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THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

JAMES HASTINGS, D.D.

EDITOR OF "THE EXPOSITORY TIMES" "THE DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE"
"THE DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS" AND
"THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS"

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RUTH.

Ruth clave unto her.—Ruth i. 14.

1. The Bible is a book of life, and it is true to life. God's dealings are alike in nature and in history; hill follows valley, light follows shadow, beauty and sublimity stand over against each other. So in the Bible we have the Book of Judges, full of war and tumult; and the Book of Samuel, full of more war and tumult. Men hate and steal and lie and kill until the heart is sick with the havoc which sin has wrought among men. But between those two books, as a beautiful valley full of flowers and fertile fields and with a gentle brook singing down through the meadows is often found between two mountain-ranges, is the Book of Ruth, a wonderful story of love and of holy character, filling all that part of the Old Testament with its fragrance.

2. The question has often been raised, what the purpose of the Book of Ruth is, and various answers have been given. The genealogical table at the end, showing David's descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture, have been alleged, and, no doubt, correctly. But the Bible is a very human book, just because it is a Divine one; and surely it would be no unworthy object to enshrine in its pages a picture of the noble working of that human love which makes so much of human life. The hallowing of the family is a distinct purpose of the Old Testament, and the beautiful example which this narrative gives of the elevating influence of domestic affection entitles it to a place in the Canon.

3. No literature contains a lovelier picture of womanhood in its various aspects than this brief Book of Ruth. There are three heroines, set in such a position as to bring out the portrait of

Ruth herself to perfection. In the Church of St. Peter's at Rome there are three domes. Standing under one of the lesser domes that flank the transept, the spectator obtains a sense of dignity and size; this is increased when he passes under the dome of the transept itself; and it becomes a wonder bordering on ecstasy when at last he stands under the sublime central dome, which appears like the vault of heaven itself. So it might seem as if there were an artistic design to bring out the character of Ruth by first engaging our affection and admiration of the lesser figures. For Orpah is a sweet and attractive creature, clinging with daughterly affection to the mother of her husband, and clinging with an even greater affection to the land of her birth; and Naomi, the elder woman, is more beautiful still. Her life and character are sketched in a few masterstrokes, but from them the world has learned to love her. But, after all, she is only a foil to her daughter-in-law, Ruth the Moabitess. Ruth is the kind of woman that draws the world after her, not by a baleful gift of beauty—there is no hint that she was fair to look upon—but by the lasting qualities of unselfish devotion, of lowly serviceableness, of maidenly modesty. She is one of the characters that humanity loves to remember. Not only does the preacher turn to her story with enthusiasm, but the poet, when the passion and purity of the nightingale are captivating his heart, thinks instinctively of her, and fancies that the bewitching strain is—

> Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn.

Men love to study the story because it touches them with the mystery and charm of early love; women love to study it because they recognize here the best type of womanhood.

4. The story itself is a simple one, made up of the ordinary elements of human life, and the actors in it are ordinary people. But, as it proceeds, the beauty of Ruth's character is unfolded; and, from the moment of her affectionate determination to accompany Naomi, she becomes the central figure of the tale. From that point right on to the end it is emphatically the Book of Ruth.

I.

In Moab.

1. The village of Bethlehem is visited by famine. Driven to consternation, one of the families resolves to emigrate. It consists of a man Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. They come into the land of Moab, a transition which means much more than a modern emigration from England to America. England and America are divided by the Atlantic; but Israel and Moab were separated by something to which the Atlantic is but a mill-pond—a difference in religion. To the Jew there was no land so distant as the land of a foreign worship. He measured all distance by the distance from his God. It was therefore a tremendous voyage which was taken by this family of Bethlehem, a voyage not to be estimated by miles, not to be gauged by the intervention of lands or seas, but to have its boundaries determined by the whole length and breadth of a universe of mind.

2. There seems to have been no absolute necessity why Elimelech should thus leave his home. Others tided over the period of distress, and so might he. But we may believe that the Bethlehemite, if he made a mistake in removing to Moab, acted in good faith and did not lose his hope of the Divine blessing. The people of Moab were nearly related to the people of Israel; but they had had a very different history. They were the descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham, but they had ceased to be the heirs of the covenant and of the promises. The pure faith that had grown up in the tents of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which had blossomed forth into splendour in the days of Moses, had among the Moabites dwindled away and decayed and died. All that was noble in the old faith had completely disappeared. The Moabites had been a thorn in the flesh to Israel as they came out from Egypt and had even led them away into the practice of wickedness.

3. In the new and heathen land the emigrant family prospered not. In a few years Naomi was a widow and was left in very

destitute circumstances. Her two sons married wives in the foreign country, adherents of the alien worship. Very soon these young men also sank by the wayside, weary with the burden and the heat of noonday toil; and, like their father, they left nothing. To all appearance Naomi was desolate. Husband and children were gone; poverty was extreme; the place of sojourn was a land of strangers; the voices of the old sanctuary were silent. Her heart and spirit were broken; her conscience was up in arms. The God of her fathers, she felt, had deserted her for her desertion of Him. She must retrieve the past; she must go back—back to the old soil, back to the favour of her God.

¶ There is nothing the human heart so much dreads as the thought of being utterly alone. I have felt it when walking about amid the surge and roar of London. To think of these dense masses of human beings utterly cut off from you makes you feel as if you were in the midst of perfect solitude. It is the thought of utter loneliness which gives its power and pathos to Hood's *Bridge of Sighs*. You remember the picture of the poor unfortunate alone on the bridge on that wild March night. The lines are among the most mournful ever penned. I learned them many long years ago from the lips of a Scone weaver, before I had ever heard of such a man as Hood. The sentiment of *loneliness* gives them their power. It is the same sentiment that gives its awfulness not only to Christ's death but to all death—that we must all leave the world *alone*; as De Quincey says: "King and priest, warrior and maiden, philosopher and child,—all must walk those mighty galleries alone." We all like to have a human hand in ours and a human heart beating for our own, at least in the great crises and troubles of life. There is One, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who has promised that He will never leave us, never forsake us, not even when heart and flesh do faint and fail. Let us seek a closer interest in Him, the Holy Lamb of God. It will brighten every joy God may give us in life. It will soothe whatever sorrow He may send us to know and feel that in Christ we have a Brother and a Friend."[1]

[1] *Dr. MacGregor of St. Cuthberts*, 131.

II.

Back to Bethlehem.

1. Naomi, broken-hearted and poverty-stricken, determined to go back and die in her native land. There was no thought on her part of taking her daughters-in-law back to Judah with her. She had never asked them to change their religion, and she felt it would not be a kindness to take them away from their own land and people. Under the impulse of affection, and without considering all the bearings of their action, Orpah and Ruth set out evidently with the intention of accompanying Naomi to Judah. She, apparently, is not aware of their intention, and supposes they have only come to see her off and to indulge in a last embrace, although *they* regard themselves as already on the way to the land of Judah. When, therefore, they reach the Ford of the Arnon, on the northern boundary of the Field of Moab, or, perhaps, when they reach the Fords of the Jordan, the eastern boundary of Judah, Naomi bids them return each to her mother's house, and prays that the Lord will deal kindly with them, as they have dealt with her dead and with her, and that He will grant that they may each find an "asylum" in the house of a new husband. As she clasps them in a parting embrace, they lift up their voices and weep. They protest, "Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people." And now Naomi has the delicate, difficult task of breaking to them, as gently as she may, the sad secret that, if they go with her, they will find no welcome from her people, no kindness from any but herself. And it is thus we reach the crisis, the moment of revelation of all three, but especially of Ruth.

2. Orpah, like Ruth, is faced by all that it means to carry out that journey to its end—all that it means in the surrender of worldly prospects, in the severing of old ties, in running new and quite incalculable risks. She has to face it, for Naomi herself, in her faithful witness to truth, puts it before them both quite plainly, and each in turn must make the great decision. Orpah the elder is the first to declare her choice. What it was Naomi records in the text: "Behold, thy sister in law is gone

back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law." Ruth's life had now reached its decisive moment. It is the moment when the great choice has to be made on which everything, as regards her fulfilment of God's purpose, must depend. What a crisis it is! And how isolated, how seemingly alone, it finds her! So far she had moved step by step with Orpah. Now Orpah her sister-in-law—Orpah, side by side with whom she had accepted the hand of her Israelite husband; Orpah, who with her had bowed under the stroke of widowhood; Orpah, who with her had started to bear Naomi company on her return to Bethlehem—now Orpah has gone.

Behind her, in the sweet light of reminiscence, is Moab, the home of her childhood, of her mother and father: the scene of her friendships, the centre of her interests. Before her lies Israel with its dark, forbidding hills, its alien faces, its unknown trials. What calls her thither? To outward seeming, little. Ease, pleasure, even common prudence, as Naomi points out, bid her return to that land where love and hope are waiting for one so winning. Yes, but she "hears a voice we cannot hear." It is the voice of duty, of compassion, of faith, of love. This calls her on, and will not let her go. That desolate widow strikes her heart with a high heroic note. And not only that. It is no mere Naomi she sees standing before her there in piteous farewell. It is her dead husband's mother. Nay, more, it is her dead husband's faith, her dead husband's Jehovah. Can she go forward to make these her own? She can, and even now she will. With a resolution conveyed in suppressed fire, Ruth refuses to quit the side of Naomi. The words in which the resolve is uttered constitute the most determined, the most decisive, the most unhesitating confession of love in all literature.

Intreat me not to leave thee,
To return from following after thee:
Whither thou goest, I will go;
Where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
Thy people shall be my people,
Thy God shall be my God:
Where thou diest, will I die,
There also will I be buried:
Jehovah do so to me, and more also,
If ought but death part thee and me.

Ruth had conquered. Great as Naomi had been in nobleness of heart, in self-sacrificing love, from this time onwards she takes only the second place in the story; it is the younger woman who becomes the heroine of the tale. The Arnon is crossed, Moab is left behind, the Jordan is passed, and at last they reach the winding way that leads them up towards Bethlehem.

¶ The story of Ruth tells where David got his poetry and all the rhythm and melody of his life. The blood in the veins of this daughter of swarthy Moab here swells and surges in fine passion; and, in the music which she makes, her heart keeps the time which worlds of larger harmony beat. What a perfect little carol of love and duty to have been begotten without a moment's effort and flung to the mountain winds! We in the finest sense know Ruth as the "meek ancestress of him who sang the songs of sore repentance" the moment we hear her lift up that tuneful voice under the open sky between Moab and Bethlehem.[1]

3. Ruth's passionate outburst of tenderness is immortal. It has put into fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving hearts, and comes to us over all the centuries between, as warm and living as when it welled up from that gentle, heroic soul. The two strongest emotions of our nature are blended in it, and each gives a portion of its fervour—love and religion. To love is to give one's self away, therefore all lesser givings are its food and delight; and, when Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered breast, and sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of giving herself to Naomi. We hear in Ruth's words also that forsaking of all things which is an essential of all true religion. Her declaration closes with a vow to Israel's God. It dethrones Chemosh for ever. It exalts Jehovah as her future guide and shield. As such, we need not scruple to call it her "conversion." We have seen how, in her, human love wrought self-sacrifice. But it was not human love alone that did it. The cord that drew her was twisted of two strands, and her love to Naomi melted into her love of Naomi's God.

¶ I believe in the holy realities of friendship,—pure, lofty, intellectual; a communion of kindred affinities, of mental similitudes; a redemption from the miserable fetters of human selfish-

[1] Armstrong Black, *The Book of Ruth*, 48.

ness; a practical obedience to the beautiful injunction of our Common Friend, "Love thy neighbour as thyself." I believe, too, that the pure love which we feel for our friends is a part and portion of that love which we owe and offer to our Creator and is acceptable to Him, inasmuch as it is offered not to the decaying elements of humanity, but to those brighter and holier attributes which are of themselves the emanations of the Divinity,—to those pure emotions of the heart and those high capacities of the soul in which that Divinity is most clearly manifested; and that, in proportion as we draw near to each other in the holy communion and unforbidden love of earthly friendship, we lessen the distance between our spirits and their Original Source,—just as the radii of a circle in approaching each other approach also their common centre.[1]

4. In Ruth's entrance into the religion of Israel we see a picture of what was intended to be the effect of Israel's relation with the Gentile world. The household of Elimelech emigrated to Moab during a famine, and, whether that were right or wrong, they were there among heathens as Jehovah-worshippers. They were meant to be missionaries, and, in Ruth's case, the purpose was fulfilled. She became the "firstfruits of the Gentiles."

¶ When Christina Mackintosh was invited to go to Africa as the wife of Coillard, the missionary, she at first yielded to the opposition of her family and declined. Two years later François Coillard wrote once more. In this second appeal she perceived a call from God which she could not resist; but it was a terrible wrench to leave everything dear to her. She was no longer in her first girlhood, she had no illusions whatever as to the kind of life that awaited her; and it was not the kind she liked; she now preferred civilization to the wilds. Besides, going to Africa was very different then from now: it meant exile for life. Her widowed mother had become reconciled to the step she was taking, and wrote to her intended son-in-law that she "would rather see her daughter a missionary than a princess." But opposition of another kind was not lacking; at this crisis of her life, the choice was deliberately put before her and as deliberately made. Her intended husband knew not all but something of what she was renouncing when he wrote, "I do not know that I could do what you are doing, giving up all for an unknown country and an almost unknown husband."

At Cape Town her first words when they met were: "I have

[1] *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, i. 113.

come to do the work of God with you, whatever it may be; and remember this—Wherever God may call you, you shall never find me crossing your path of duty."[1]

III.

In the Harvest Field.

The whole city was moved at Naomi's return, but no one seems to have been moved by her penitence and grief. She is left alone, save for "Ruth the Moabitess," as the sacred historian once more calls her, to bring out the contrast between the tenderness of this heathen outcast and the austerity of the pious Hebrews of Bethlehem.

1. Ruth is a beautiful character—as beautiful from home as at home, in Bethlehem as in Moab. No sooner do we find her in Bethlehem than we see her in the field of Boaz, gleaning after the reapers. We have not only romance here, but romance wedded to reality, a combination of Mary and Martha. It is Ruth herself who suggests going out to the field to glean, a very lowly task indeed; not the honourable task of reaper, but that of following the reaper and gathering up the fragments, the humble place of the widow and the orphan and the very poor. Under the Jewish law the poor were permitted to glean in any field. It was against the law that the owner of the field should gather all the wheat and barley from the harvest; but the poor were suffered to gather the gleanings. That was their right.

We assign new honour to Ruth for entering these harvest fields. She took her place among the old and the sad and the poor. She was evidently too proud to beg; she was proud enough not even to grumble; but she was not too proud to do the bit of honest work which the great Taskmaster seemed to assign her in His wide household, wherein He bids every one work, with heart or brain or brow of sweat. She was meek and lowly in heart, and accepted the position of one of God's poor, and her eyes waited upon the Lord her God until He had mercy on her.

¶ The fact of Ruth in these fields where the reapers reaped has a place like a fixture on the walls of human memory. The world's

[1] *Coillard of the Zambesi*, 97.

vision of her among the corn is so pleasing that it is not allowed to pass away. Men of noble gifts as well as simple children have given their thought of her there some fine riveting; and, near their heart, she is with them to stay. Children unconsciously judge well both in literature and art; they remember best what is best worth remembering; they remember things by the heart; and the child has a picture of Ruth gleaning, in that elect recess of memory where are hung in elfin framing scenes from fairyland and from the enraptured balladry which the universal heart has sanctioned, and around which child-fancy plays with its gentlest wizardry.[1]

2. So Ruth started out one morning to glean; and it happened, says the sacred narrative, that she lighted on the field of Boaz. Perhaps a pious writer would have said that Providence directed her footsteps there; but this writer is not too pious to use the language of common life: "her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." She began her work; at noon this rich kinsman came down to the field, and was attracted by the young woman. The fame of Ruth's virtue and piety, of her kindness to Naomi and her devotion to Naomi's God, had preceded her; and Boaz no sooner learned who she was than he treated her with the utmost courtesy and respect, and sent her home laden with corn which she had gleaned.

Ruth's modesty captured the heart of the God-fearing and prosperous farmer Boaz—a modesty that was the outcome of a genuine humility of heart. "I pray you, let me glean, and gather after the reapers among the sheaves"—not claiming it as a right, but looking upon it as a favour. Her grateful and graceful acknowledgment also of the kindness of Boaz when he took notice of the stranger and alien has a fine old-world flavour about it: "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"

Her love, her willing sacrifice, her sublime, beautiful, womanly courage and daring; her cleaving to an aged woman who was bereaved, despoiled, homeless, and who felt herself put away by God—this it was that drew out the fire and the strength of the soul of Boaz, and caused him to name upon Ruth the name of his

[1] Armstrong Black, *The Book of Ruth*, 90.

God: "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." So he sets her devotion, the devotion of her pure human heart, in the soft, rosy radiance of his religion, and it burns and shines with the light and colours of all manner of precious stones.

The blessing of Boaz fell on the heart of Ruth like showers on the mown grass. Hitherto she had known only sorrow and shame. No Israelite had recognized her, or helped her, or shown either any appreciation of her noble love for her mother-in-law or any wish to welcome her to the faith and privilege of Israel. To all but Boaz she was simply "the Moabitess"—a stranger to the Covenant, an alien from the Commonwealth. But now the valiant soldier whom all Bethlehem praised, who sat as judge and teacher among his people, blesses her for her goodness, and assures her of the protection and goodwill of the God of Israel.

¶ A man feels in himself the love of praise. Every man does who is not a brute. It is a universal human faculty; Carlyle nicknames it the sixth sense. Who made it? God or the devil? Is it flesh or spirit? A difficult question; because tamed animals grow to possess it in a high degree; and our metaphysic does not yet allow them spirit. But, whichever it be, it cannot be for bad: only bad when misdirected, and not controlled by reason, the faculty which judges between good and evil. Else why has God put His love of praise into the heart of every child which is born into the world, and entwined it into the holiest, filial, and family affections, as the earliest mainspring of good actions? Has God appointed that every child shall be fed first with a necessary lie, and afterwards come to the knowledge of your supposed truth, that the praise of God alone is to be sought? Or are we to believe that the child is intended to be taught as delicately and gradually as possible the painful fact, that the praise of all men is not equally worth having, and to use his critical faculty to discern the praise of good men from the praise of bad, to seek the former and despise the latter? I should say that the last was the more reasonable. And this I will say, that if you bring up any child to care nothing for the praise of its parents, its elders, its pastors, and masters, you may make a fanatic of it, or a shameless cynic: but you will neither make it a man, an Englishman, nor a Christian.[1]

[1] *Charles Kingsley: His Letters and Memories of his Life*, i. 354.

IV.

By the Threshing-Floor.

1. Naomi was profoundly impressed by the extraordinary favour shown to her daughter-in-law by her husband's kinsman, and saw in it an answer to her prayers and a promise of future blessing. And as the days of harvest passed, and evening by evening the girl returned with her store of grain and with fresh stories of the unfailing kindness she had experienced, Naomi formed a resolution in her mind for the welfare of this dear girl who had followed her into a strange land, and was here toiling to maintain her. Boaz, she told her daughter-in-law, was "one of those who should redeem" them.

Among the Hebrews the family relationship was a very close one; blood was always felt to be thicker than water. Did an Israelite become poor, and was he forced to sell his field, the duty of the next-of-kin was to buy it back again; was he sold as a slave, his kinsman's duty was to redeem him. Was he accidentally slain, the next-of-kin became the avenger of his blood, and pursued his slayer to the very gate of the city of refuge. He had still another and more delicate duty, altogether alien to our modern and Western notions. Did an Israelite die without children, leaving a widow behind him, it became the duty of the next-of-kin to marry the widow, so that children, as nearly related as possible in blood, might receive the inheritance of him who had passed away. It was to this law that Naomi now thought of appealing. Ruth indeed was a stranger and a foreigner, and her claim upon Israelite law might easily have been evaded; it was the kindness shown her by Boaz during the harvest season that inspired Naomi to make the attempt.

2. Naomi's plot was a bold one. She sent Ruth to claim Boaz as the kinsman whose duty it was to marry her and become her protector. Ruth was to go to the threshing-floor on the night of the harvest festival, wait until Boaz lay down to sleep beside the mass of winnowed grain, and place herself at his feet, so reminding him that, if no other would, it was his part to be a husband to her for the sake of Elimelech and his sons. The plan

was daring and appears to us to be at least indelicate. It is impossible to say whether any custom of the time sanctioned it; but even in that case we cannot acquit Naomi of resorting to a stratagem with the view of bringing about what seemed most desirable for Ruth and herself.

The relations between Naomi and Ruth are to be remembered at this point. Ruth was a stranger in Bethlehem, and in the ways and manners of the land she knew not her right hand from her left. But Naomi was an old inhabitant; she knew about everything, and had such guidance of Ruth that whenever she said "Do this," we may be sure that Ruth did it. Not only so, but, under the awe of her recently espoused religion, the strangest law and rite of the country would have a sacredness in Ruth's eyes; and never would she be less inclined to hesitate and question than when some holy mystery was flung around Naomi's directions. This view of the half-alluring, half-entangling power of religion in her case seems to be both indicated and verified by the instant way in which she replied, when Naomi, with just an insinuation of the Divine sanction, bade her do very strange things: "All that thou sayest unto me I will do."

3. Perhaps Naomi knew, or suspected, that Boaz looked with kindness, with respect and admiration, on Ruth. Perhaps, too, she was aware of the two considerations which held him back from seeking a wife in Ruth. These considerations were, as we learn from the third chapter, first, that there was a nearer kinsman than himself, who had a prior legal claim on Ruth; and secondly, that he was very much older than Ruth, and hesitated to place himself in the way of a more suitable and equal match.

Nor did Ruth suffer loss through the blundering of Naomi, for this interview with Boaz straightened out the difficulty which otherwise would still have caused him to refrain from interfering with their concerns. How differently things might have turned out if he had not been wiser than Naomi and more jealous for his own reputation as well as Ruth's. He saved the situation for both, and to him all the credit is due, not to the woman who devised this plan of bringing them together.

4. Ruth's claim, once made, put Boaz in a different position; he would now see her righted or would right her himself.

In his heart he was overjoyed. In his view she had shown "more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning." Then she had been willing for the sake of Naomi to leave her father, her mother, her country and her religion. Now she wished to obey the law of Israel, and to show kindness unto the family of Elimelech. But Boaz did not simply laud her fidelity and piety. He promised that, should the nearer kinsman refuse the duty and honour, he himself would redeem her dead husband's name and inheritance. Probably Boaz found it hard to utter the words, "There is a nearer *goel* than I"; for obviously by this time, as his allusion to "the young men" indicates, he was deeply attached to his young kinswoman. And it illustrates the nobility of his character, his honour and integrity, that he should propose to give this "nearer kinsman" his legal due, although to give it might cost him no small sacrifice.

When in the morning Ruth returned with her six measures of barley, Naomi felt that the battle was won, and that all that was now necessary was to possess their souls in patience for a little and they would see the end.

¶ Shakespeare says—

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough hew them how we will.

And that Divine One will shape everything towards the end He has planned, if He may have our consent. This is the working basis of the whole problem of guidance. It simplifies it much. It is not coaxing a friendly God to keep us along a path we have marked out for ourselves. It is finding and fitting into the plan lovingly thought out for us, and doing the service assigned to us in the great world-plan. Guidance is a matter of finding God's plan and following it faithfully step by step. A man should aim to have a keen understanding of what God's plan for him is. The likeness of God imprinted upon him puts him under obligation to find out the plan of God intended for him.[1]

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Personal Problems*, 157.

V.

At the Gate.

The open space at the gate of the city was the place where legal decisions were given by the Elders and the greater part of the business of the town was transacted. That gate had already seen a great part of the story. It had seen Elimelech, rich in flocks and herds, setting out for the land of Moab. It had seen Naomi returning, poor, friendless and desolate. It had seen Ruth going forth every morning to the harvest-field; it had seen her returning with her gleanings in the evening. It was but fitting that the gate should see how it was all to end.

¶ At the present day the people of the East have reverted to their primitive customs regarding the uses of the gate, and many business and social duties are carried out there. Thomson (*The Land and the Book*, i. 31) mentions having seen at Jaffa the *Ḳâḍi* and his court sitting at the entrance of the gate, hearing and adjudicating all sorts of cases in the audience of all that went in and out thereat. At Suakin in 1886 Sir Charles Warren found it necessary to sit at the gate to transact official business in order that the public might freely approach and relate their grievances. Bertrandon de la Brocquière (*Early Travels*, 349, A.D. 1433) gives an interesting account of his reception at the court of the Turks, the "Sublime Porte," at Constantinople. The ambassadors were received at the gate of the palace, and all business was transacted there. Chardin relates that the principal gate of the royal palace of Ispahan was held sacred, and used by criminals as a place of refuge. Sir Charles Warren conducted all his business transactions with the governors of Al-Arish, Nukl, and Akabah in 1882 at the gate, where there were arched roofs giving protection from the sun and rain, and seats for the administration of justice. At Nukl the council chamber was immediately over the gate. The city gateways of the present day have usually flanking towers and overhead galleries, with an arched passage within, so that a second set of gates may be erected inside the barbican or courtyard.[1]

1. Early in the morning Boaz appeared on this bustling scene, and waited until the kinsman of whom he had spoken to Ruth came by. Hailing him, he asked him to sit down by his

[1] Sir Charles Warren, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 112.

side, and in the presence of ten chosen Elders he opened his business. Two matters were involved: the inheritance of Elimelech in Israel, and the acceptance of Ruth the Moabitess as the representative of the family of Elimelech. As regards the first, the redemption of the land, the nearer kinsman had no scruples; he would do his duty. As regards the second, he was unwilling to interfere; he preferred that his rights should pass over to Boaz. The reason he gave was, "Lest I mar my own inheritance." He did not wish to have anything to do with Moabites or Moabitesses; perhaps he shared in the feeling that on their account all this evil had come upon the family of Elimelech. In any case he would run no risks, he would look after himself. So drawing off his shoe he handed it to Boaz, this being at once a symbolic transference of his rights, and a modified form of the old penalty attaching to the non-fulfilment of the law.

¶ The establishing of a connexion with a property is indicated by a man casting one of his shoes upon it. This is based upon the fact that walking upon a piece of ground is a sign of proprietorship. We may recall the Roman custom of bringing before the prætor a clod of earth from the field which one claimed as his property. A certain relation was established also when Elijah the prophet cast his mantle upon Elisha. A special meaning may be discovered in this act, namely, the investiture with the prophetic mantle. So the covering of a woman with one's mantle (Ezek. xvi. 8; Ruth iii. 9) expresses the intention of becoming her protector *par excellence*, *i.e.* of marrying her. The correct view of Ezek. xvi. 8 and Ruth iii. 9 is confirmed by Arab custom. "The son who, in the heathen period of Arab history, took over the widow of his father, threw his garment over her. So, too, Mohammed cast his mantle over the Jewess Safîja, captured at Khaibar, as a token that he desired to have her in marriage."

The opposite condition of things, namely, the dissolution of relations, is indicated as follows. One person takes off another's shoe (Deut. xxv. 9), or the wearer removes it himself (Ruth iv. 8). The idea at the basis of this act may be explained thus. Seeing that one enters upon the occupancy of a field by treading upon it with his shoes, the pulling off of the shoe indicates the intention of *not* carrying out this occupancy. The drawing off of the shoe was also, among the Arabs, a special sign of the dissolution of a marriage.[1]

[1] E. König, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, v. 171.

2. With profound and solemn emotion Boaz called on the Elders and the circle of bystanders to observe and remember this legal transfer of rights and duties, expressing himself, however, with legal fulness and precision: "Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day." They replied: "We are witnesses"—thus completing the legal transaction—and broke out into a profusion of good wishes which amply verified the statement of Boaz concerning Ruth in the previous chapter: "All the gate of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." They lifted her to the level of the most famous women of Israel by praying that she might be like Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the twelve tribes. They would not have uttered this prayer if they had not come to esteem her, for her love and piety, as an Israelite indeed. It was a happy day to both Boaz and Ruth when, amidst the benedictions of all present, they were united, and next to the joy of the bride and bridegroom Naomi's was probably the greatest.

¶ Ruth and Boaz in the union of their actual lives represented the marriage of the Gentile and the Jew. Ruth was the child of Moab, the daughter of a foreign soil, the votary of a heathen religion; Boaz was a genuine son of Israel who had never separated from the parent stem, whose blood had never been tinged with intermixture from without. Their union symbolized the meeting of extremes, prefigured an age of charity, when the hearts of men should be larger than their creeds and the spirit of nations bigger than their boundaries. In the soul of Jesus the wedding-bells of Ruth and Boaz are rung once more. Here again Moab and Israel meet together. In the heart of the Son of Man the Gentile stands side by side with the Jew as the recipient of a common Divine Fatherhood. What is it but the sound of wedding-bells that He hears when He cries, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God"? What is it but the footsteps of Ruth that He discerns when He exclaims, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold"? What is it but the tread of Moab in the field that catches His ear when He makes

the qualification for approach to Him not human possession but human need, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? The marriage-bells of Ruth at Bethlehem were the same bells which sounded at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.[1]

3. The curtain rises again for one brief moment to give us a sweet glimpse of domestic life in the household of Boaz. We see Ruth, a happy wife and a still happier mother. We see Naomi, spending the calm evening of her clouded life, not separated from the abiding love of her daughter-in-law, living once more in the new representative of the house of Elimelech. It is to her, not to Ruth, that the congratulations of the women are addressed. For in a true sense the babe was hers, the restorer of her life, the nourisher of her old age, the builder up of the fortunes of her house, because in him the great love of her daughter-in-law had become a visible, an embodied fact.

No finer tribute could have been paid to the character of Ruth than the tribute paid by the neighbours after the birth of her child. All feeling of jealousy against the alien who has come among them has passed away, and in congratulating Naomi they express themselves in this way: "Thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne this child." Coming from those women of Bethlehem who at the first must have envied the good fortune of Ruth and looked upon this union with one of their best citizens as a slight upon their own daughters—coming from such neighbours, it is a splendid tribute to the qualities alike of head and of heart possessed by Ruth.

And so the story closes, not simply leaving these two brave and noble women happy in each other, and in Boaz, and in Obed his son, but weaving for them an immortal crown of honour in that it marks their intimate connexion with David, the "darling of Israel," and with Him who was at once David's Son and Lord. "Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David"; and of David, as concerning the flesh, came Jesus the Christ, the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of the people of Israel.

¶ Ruth's voluntary and wonderful attachment to Israel's people, and land, and God—attachment testified in sorest trial,

[1] G. Matheson, *The Representative Women of the Bible*, 200.

when all hope seemed gone, and there was but an aged, childless, homeless widow to cling to—had its reward correspondent to the intense love, and devotion, and disinterestedness. That reward, what is it? Behold it first in the favour and then in the plighted troth of Boaz. Behold it in Ruth of Moab as the ancestress of the royal house of David. Behold it in Ruth of Moab as the ancestress of Jesus Christ our Lord. Behold it in that Book of Ruth forming a part of inspired Scripture, with its simple, pathetic story—a sacred pastoral poem. The less we put our service of God in the form of bargain and covenant, the more likely are we to fare with special richness at the end.[1]

But go to! thy love
Shall chant itself its own beatitudes
After its own life-working. A child's kiss
Set on thy sighing lips shall make thee glad;
A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
Thou shalt be served thyself by every sense
Of service which thou renderest. Such a crown
I set upon thy head.[2]

[1] J. Rankin, *Character Studies in the Old Testament*, 90.
[2] E. B. Browning.

SAMUEL.

I.

In Favour with God.

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In Favour with God.

And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.—1 Sam. ii. 26.

1. The period of Samuel was a critical period in the nation's life because it was a time of transition. In religion and in politics it was a period marked by change. The age of the judges was drawing to an end; the demand for a king was making itself heard. Such times of transition, when old things are passing away and the new era is not yet fully come, are difficult and perilous times in the life of a nation; they carry with them something of the mystery and of the painfulness that belong to all processes of birth; and, for any leading personality who endeavours to sum up and to guide their uncertain tendencies, they involve misunderstanding or neglect. Samuel, in whose day the theocracy at which he had been aiming in his organization of the national forces was merged in monarchy, has been called the first martyr of the order of prophets. He stood between the past and the future, the living and the dead. Brought up in reverence for the days of old, he attempted to be the mediator, in a changeful epoch, between the old and the new; and thus he found himself among those of whom it has been said that they are attacked from both sides—charged with not going far enough and with going too far, with saying too much and with saying too little; who cannot be comprehended at a glance like Moses or Elijah or Isaiah and therefore are thrust aside, and yet who are "the silent healers who bind up the wounds of their age in spite of itself"; "the reconcilers who turn the hearts of the children to the fathers and of the fathers to the children." The real power of such men lies in the fact that, while they are driven more or less to take active part in the political developments of their country, they are or may be—as Samuel was—men of deep religious feeling, seeing Him who is invisible and trying to shape

their politics, amid the hard, intractable affairs of this world, in accordance with the Divine will.

¶ The darkest part of the night is just before the dawn. When the enemy comes in like a flood the Lord lifts up a standard against him. God never leaves Himself without a witness. Somewhere, in the most godless times, can be found those who love and serve God. Elijah may fancy that he alone is left to stand for the truth among a nation of idolaters, but God shows him that he has yet seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And God makes this very Elijah the beginning of a second line of prophets, that holds on through Elisha and Ezekiel even to Malachi and John the Baptist. At the very time that the army of the king of Syria is stricken with blindness, supernatural vision is granted to Elisha's servant, and the young man's eyes are opened; he sees, and, behold! the mountain is full of horses and chariots of fire round about his master. So, in every dark day in the history of His people, God wakens some chosen servant of His to see what the common crowd are blind to.[1]

2. The affairs of Israel were allowed to drift into a lamentable condition under the good and well-meaning but weak Eli. The disuniting process of centuries seemed then to have done its worst. The tribes had been falling more and more apart; and now at length, instead of forming one nation, they were more like a group of petty states, each taken up with its own individual interests, and little concerned to maintain oneness with the rest. In Israel, by Eli's time, the idea of nationality had been largely lost sight of. It was not counted worth caring for, much less fighting for; and the policy of selfishness and drift was everywhere in favour. This state of things, deplorable enough in the case of any country, was peculiarly melancholy in the case of God's favoured people, who, in addition to the ordinary ties of brotherhood, ought to have been welded together by their common loyalty to Jehovah, who offered Himself as His people's portion, and was pleased to regard them as His own inheritance. The one outward bond that subsisted longest between the tribes was the religious ceremonial observed at Shiloh. Even that, no doubt, had sunk into a piece of ritual, and in too many cases a piece of mere routine. Still, it *was* a bond, however slight and feeble, between the tribes, as they assembled together at stated seasons

[1] A. H. Strong.

at Shiloh, professedly to worship the one Jehovah. But Shiloh itself, alas! instead of being a healthy religious centre, a throbbing heart of national piety, a "Place of Rest," as its name means, became in course of time a centre of corruption. And then came the catastrophe for which Israel was fully ripe. An unprovoked war, waged in a heathenish spirit, could have but one appropriate result; and when poor old Eli,—the object at once of pity and of blame,—crushed under the accumulation of disaster, fell back dead in the day of woe, and passed from the midst of a nation and a time with whose necessities he had been far too feeble to cope, it was at least evident that Israelitish affairs had sunk to their very lowest. At any rate there was now the grim comfort for any patriot that things could not become worse than they were, and might possibly improve. The symbol of God's presence was gone. Shiloh, its home for three centuries, was but a shadow of what it had been; for neither Jehovah nor His ark was there, and its oracles were dumb.

¶ The passage from a Theocracy to a Monarchy was so dangerous that it would have been no great surprise if the ship of the State had gone to pieces. That it made its journey successfully was due entirely to Samuel's skilful steering. And the skilful steering was due to Samuel's character rather than his worldly wisdom, to his knowledge of God rather than his knowledge of men. "Because," writes Dean Stanley, "in him the various parts of his life hung together without any abrupt transition; because in him the child was father of the man, and his days had been bound each to each by natural piety; therefore he was especially ordained to bind together the broken links of two diverging epochs; therefore he could impart to others, and to the age in which he lived, the continuity which he had experienced in his own life; therefore he could gather round him the better spirits of his time by that discernment of a pure heart which sees through heaven and hell." He knew how events were trending, what their inevitable issue must be; and if he made a mistake in the selection of the first king, it was not one that he could have avoided.[1]

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 80.

I.

Samuel's Birth and Childhood.

And she called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.—1 Sam. i. 20.

But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child.—1 Sam. ii. 18.

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel said, Speak; for thy servant heareth.—1 Sam. iii. 10.

1. *The child Samuel was asked of the Lord.*—In olden times children got names from some circumstance attending their birth, or some hope regarding their future lives. The Bible gives us many examples of this. Thus Moses and John and Jesus and Samuel are all names with a meaning, and intended to instruct.

Hannah had a reason, too, for the name she gave her child. She said, "I have asked him of the Lord," and called him Samuel.

Hannah was the wife of Elkanah, an Ephrathite, and for a long time she was without children; and to be without children was counted a reproach among the Israelites. This reproach Hannah had to bear. "Her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret," because she had no child. In her trouble she sought the Lord. She sought Him with earnest supplication. It is a prayer full of confidence in God. She addresses Him as the "Lord of Hosts" (Jehovah-Sabaoth)—the first time this afterwards familiar name is found on the page of Scripture. She calls on Him, that is to say, as the Lord who rules in heaven and earth; who leads out the hosts of heaven, the stars, by number; who sends the hosts who dwell in heaven, the angels, upon His errands; who, as the Lord of Sabaoth among men too, can do His will, as in heaven, so also among the inhabitants of earth. If such a God as this will but speak the word, Hannah knows that all things are possible with Him. She has every confidence that He can grant her the desire of her heart. It is a prayer, further, that is full of fervour and yet of submission. "Look," she urges, "look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid." In this intense reiteration the supplicant is pouring out her very soul before God, if haply He may condescend to regard her plaint and to remember her petition. But, while fervent, the prayer is no less submissive in its tone. "If thou

wilt," Hannah begins; and, as her supplication proceeds, it breathes, even in its importunity, the spirit of one who desires to submit her own will and judgment to the wisdom and goodness of her God. And it is, the while, an expectant prayer. She feels that she has come with her trouble to the right quarter. Her Maker and God, to whom she has now unburdened her heart so completely, will not turn away her prayer from Him unheeded, or withhold His mercy from her. In some wise, beneficent way, she is sure the Lord will deal with her petition. She expects, she knows that. She can leave it all with Him. Through the confidence of her faith her bitterness of heart is soothed away, and when she rises from her knees "her countenance is no more sad."

Hannah realized, even before Eli spoke, that the merciful Burden-bearer had heard and answered her prayer. She had entered into the spirit of the prayer, which not only asks, but takes. She anticipated those wonderful words which, more than any others, disclose the secret of prevailing supplication: "All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Before ever the words of Eli, "Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thy petition that thou hast asked of him," had fallen like a summer shower on a parched land, she knew that she had prevailed, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, filled and kept her mind and heart. It fell out to Hannah according to her faith. Blessed was she that had believed, for there was a performance unto her of the promises which God had made to her secret soul. The Lord remembered her, and, when the time had come about, she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the Lord."

¶ If ever there was a child of many prayers, Samuel was he. His life was an answer to the fervent supplication of his mother, by whom he was dedicated before his birth to the holy service of Jehovah. For weal or for woe a mother's influence is infinitely great. We are not surprised to learn that Byron's mother was proud, ill-tempered, and violent; or that Nero's was a murderess. On the other hand, we need not be astonished that Sir Walter Scott's was a lover of poetry; or those of Wesley, Augustine, Chrysostom, Basil, and others, remarkable for their intelligence and goodness. Like mother, like child. This is what led the good Lord Shaftesbury to exclaim, "Give me a generation of Christian

mothers, and I will undertake to change the face of society in twelve months."[1]

When barren Hannah, prostrate on the floor,
In heat of zeal and passion did implore
Redress from Heaven, censorious Eli thought
She had been drunk, and check'd her for her fault;—
Rough was his censure, and his check austere;—
Where mildness should be used we're oft severe.

But when his lustful sons, that could abuse
The House of God, and ill God's offerings use,
Appeared before him, his indulgent tongue
Compounded rather than rebuked the wrong.
He dare not shoot for fear he wound his child;—
Where we should be severe, we're oft too mild.[2]

2. *Hannah lent Samuel to the Lord.*—Living in the great age of vows, Hannah had before Samuel's birth dedicated him to the office of a Nazirite. As soon as he was weaned, she herself with her husband brought him to the tabernacle at Shiloh, where she had received the first intimation of his birth, and there solemnly consecrated him. Then his mother made him over to Eli. From that time the child was shut up in the tabernacle. The priests furnished him with a sacred garment, an ephod, made, like their own, of white linen, though of inferior quality; and his mother every year gave him a little mantle reaching down to his feet, such as was worn only by high personages, or women, over the other dress, and this he retained as his badge till the latest times of his life. He seems to have slept within the holiest place, and his special duty was to put out the sacred candlestick, and to open the doors at sunrise. In this way his childhood was passed.

(1) It was whilst thus sleeping in the tabernacle that Samuel received his first prophetic call. When about to bring in great changes and to substitute the new priesthood in place of the old, not to Eli, the aged priest, nor to any who might be great before men in station and authority, did God reveal His judgments; He communicated the heavy tidings to the child in the temple. The occasion may have part in our Lord's great thanksgiving, when

[1] E. Morgan, *The Calls of God*, 119. [2] Francis Quarles.

He rejoiced in spirit and said, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." And how full of interest is the whole narrative: Samuel, the thrice called of God, the thrice chosen, thrice loved—as if, as in the case of St. Peter afterwards, that repeated invocation of his name were a token of great things that were to be done by him hereafter. And with what ready childlike obedience was the call heard! It was indeed receiving the Kingdom of God as a little child. And we may notice the modesty of nature which there is about the child of prayer, he is as a child throughout in bearing this vision of God; he rises from sleep, he hastens to his priest and guide; and after all he lies down again in peace and quiet. There is nothing constrained, nothing unsuitable; for Divine love "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly"; nor, again, does it willingly divulge what it receives from God. Such is the natural simplicity of the child of prayer.

¶ Why did God speak to a Samuel and not to an Eli? Why was there no man of maturer years to come from the outer world and speak to the priest at the temple and tell him of the judgment on his house? Why, because God seeks the susceptible heart and the open door. It is according as we live that God comes; it is as we spend our days and our hours in the holy place, and our hearts are waiting and open, that we hear the voice of God, and are conscious of the Holy One. As Samuel was prepared, so Samuel heard the voice; and as you and I live as it were in the presence of God, does God come to speak to us. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."[1]

(2) "And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him (literally, "had been with him"), and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." It is evident that other Divine communications followed upon the first, and that already in early youth Samuel had become a national influence: "And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 21). This expression, "revealed himself," is a very striking one. It means, literally, "uncovered the ear," as

[1] R. J. Campbell, *The Song of Ages*, 283.

one in the East might brush back the flowing hair of an intimate friend and pour into his ear confidences meant for none beside. Already Hannah was reaping abundant interest for her precious loan. For the pain of the early severance she had now double in her own soul. She had no hard dealer to transact with in Jehovah. She had given to Him only what was all the while His own; and yet how rich was the recompense He brought to the Israelitish mother's heart. "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him." We cannot fail to be struck with the contrast between the bright, progressive, gracious development of Samuel and the fast downward course of Eli's sons, who, madly grasping at base present gratification, lent none of their powers to God, but, forfeiting all the happiness of the future in time and eternity for the sake of short-lived sensual pleasure, went down quickly to dishonoured graves. Samuel's was a good motto, surely, for youth or age, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." And for any young life this is an enviable record—"And he grew"—in knowledge, in power, in wisdom, in favour, in influence—"he grew, and the Lord was with him."

Speak to me, Christ, amid earth's sin and riot,
That I may hear
Thy Love's sweet pleading near,
Bringing my spirit quiet.

Low by the dripping levels of my life,
Here dwelleth Sin,
Barring my heart lest Love should enter in,
And setting all my dreams about with strife.

Speak to me out of Thy Love's quiet stretching spaces,
That, though afar,
I follow may the promise of Thy star,
And see again the old, loved, faded faces.

And if, amid the songs of Cherubim
Where all saints be,
The Father hear the pleading needs of me,
And, stooping, see mine eyes all sorrow dim,

And lead me where my feet, sin shaken free,
May safely stand
In Love's own fatherland,
Seeing and loving, 'twere enough for me![1]

[1] L. MacLean Watt, *In Poets' Corner*, 113.

II.

The Prophet of the Lord.

And all Israel from Dan even to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.—1 Sam. iii. 20.

And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer.—1 Sam. ix. 19.

The distinguishing title for Samuel most commonly on our lips is, "Samuel the Prophet." He may be fairly regarded, indeed, as, in one important respect, "the first of the prophets." There were, no doubt, prophets before his time. Moses, great on almost every side, was a prophet mighty in words and in deeds, in some respects a unique type of the Greater One like unto him, who was to come. And to various men of God, and women too—such as Deborah—particular messages had been entrusted at different times by Jehovah. But Samuel, to Israel as a second Moses, was the first of that long, unbroken line of heaven-sent teachers, men of Divinely inspired insight and foresight, who from his time to the time of Malachi had so important a part to play alongside of the kingship—to guide, to restrain, and sometimes to oppose the throne, and to touch at many points the national life—rousing the listless from their apathy, denouncing the profane, ministering comfort to the depressed, awakening hope, and especially Messianic hope, among the faithful in Israel.

1. As we have seen, Samuel's youth was a time of preparation for his after-life. When he was yet a child, Samuel was made a seer before he knew. He saw enough of God and man that terrible night to make him an old man and a seer before the morning. As he lay awake till the morning he saw what was the wages of all that wickedness that had so horrified him to see and to hear in Eli's sons. He saw, while yet a child, that the wages of such sin is death. And he saw what would be the end of all that to Eli also, his father in the Lord. It was indeed no wonder that he hesitated to tell Eli what he had seen and heard that terrible night. And all that must have worked powerfully together to make young Samuel the pure, prayerful, holy child before God and man that he early was and continued to be. His purity of heart and his love for holy things prepared Samuel early to be a

seer; and the sights he saw both in heaven and in earth, both in God and in man, only perfected all his days what had been so early and so well begun.

¶ What is a *Seer*? One who *Sees*, whose eye pierces beyond this life into the infinite and even attempts to penetrate the very purposes of God.

> That to the height of his great argument
> He may assert Eternal Providence
> And justify the ways of God to man.

He is the eagle who can face the sun, unblinded. He is above and beyond philosophy through excess of insight, not of mere ecstasy. He has been "caught up into the third heaven, where he has heard things unspeakable," but he has come back to earth with the glow of the third heaven about him and can lift us towards it, though not to it. Wordsworth well describes the Seer when he writes of

> that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and *become a living soul*:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> *We see into the life of things.*[1]

2. There are two types of experience among God's greatest servants. St. Paul, made an Apostle from a persecutor, heads the one class. Timothy in the New Testament and Samuel in the Old represent the other. An Augustine or a Bunyan is made the more earnest, humble, and whole-hearted by the remembrance of a wasted youth and of God's arresting mercy. But there is a serenity and a continuity about a life which has grown up in the fear of God that have their own charm and blessing. It is well to have "much transgression" forgiven, but it may be better to have always been "innocent" and ignorant of it. Pardon cleanses sin, and even turns the memory of it into an ally of holiness; but traces are left on character, and, at the best, years have been squandered which do not return. Samuel is the

[1] H. B. Garrod, *Dante, Goethe's Faust and other Lectures*, 19.

pattern of child religion and service, to which teachers should aim that their children may be conformed.

¶ As regards what is of consequence in the personal life, Dean Stanley, in a passage of profound insight and rare beauty, has availed himself of the example of Samuel to contrast the religion created by convulsion with the religion developed by growth. Of this last, Samuel is the standing type. There is many an abrupt transition from a life of self-indulgence to a life of self-consecration, in which a great chasm breaks in between the years before and after the sudden conversion. Well for those who, in looking back on wasted years, can see such a chasm in the ever-memorable crisis of repentance separating the sinful past from the regenerated life. But better for those who can look back, like Samuel, on an unbroken growth from childhood up in the way of God, in a life which carries no consciousness of stains and weakness and doubts inherited from years misguided and misspent.[1]

3. It is remarkable that in so active and varied a life as that of Samuel we find only two well-defined points, and these separated by the long interval between the child and the old man. The history is quite minute in its detail, both of the young child's introduction into the service of Jehovah and of the old man's agency in the inauguration of the monarchy. The period between has the briefest record: "Samuel judged Israel forty years." The reason of this silence is doubtless in the character of the time—a time of calamity under ferocious oppression, a time of fighting rather than writing. We next come upon Samuel at a time of almost unbounded importance in the history of Israel, and here again we find in him the "prophet of the Lord."

(1) Samuel is called emphatically "The Prophet." To a certain extent this was in consequence of the gift which he shared in common with others of his time. He was specially known in his own age as "Samuel the Seer." "I am the seer," was his answer to Saul when he said, "Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is?" "Seer," the ancient name, was not yet superseded by "prophet." "The Lord uncovered his ear" to whisper into it in the stillness of the night the messages that were to be delivered. It is the first distinct intimation of the idea of "revelation" to a human being. Samuel was consulted far and near on the small affairs of life; loaves of bread, or the fourth

[1] J. M. Whiton, *What of Samuel?* 65.

part of a shekel of silver, were paid for the answers. From this faculty, combined with his office of ruler, an awful reverence grew up round him. No sacrificial feast was thought complete without his blessing. When he appeared suddenly elsewhere for the same purpose, the villagers "trembled" at his approach. A peculiar virtue was believed to reside in his intercession. He was conspicuous in later times among those that "call upon the name of the Lord," and was placed with Moses as standing for prayer, in a special sense, before the Lord (Jer. xv. 1).

(2) But there is another point which more especially placed him at the head of the prophetic order as it afterwards appeared. This is brought out in his relation to Saul. He represents the independence of the Moral Law, of the Divine will as distinct from regal or sacerdotal enactments, which is so remarkable a characteristic of all the later prophets. He certainly was not a priest; and all attempts to identify his opposition to Saul with a hierarchical interest are founded on a complete misconception of the facts of the case. From the time of the overthrow of Shiloh, he never appears in the remotest connexion with the priestly order. Among all the places included in his personal or administrative visits, neither Shiloh, nor Nob, nor Gibeon, the seats of the sacerdotal caste, is ever mentioned. When he counsels Saul, it is not as the priest but as the prophet; when he sacrifices or blesses the sacrifices, it is not as the priest but either as an individual Israelite of eminence, or as a ruler, like Saul himself. Saul's sin, in both instances when he came into collision with Samuel, was not of intruding into sacerdotal functions, but of disobedience to the prophetic voice. The first was that of not waiting for Samuel's arrival, according to the sign given by Samuel at his original meeting at Ramah; the second was that of not carrying out the stern prophetical injunction for the destruction of the Amalekites. When, on that occasion, the aged prophet called the captive prince before him, and with his own hands hacked him limb from limb, in retribution for the desolation he had brought into the homes of Israel, and thus offered up his mangled remains almost as a human sacrifice, we see the representative of the older part of the Jewish history. But it is the true prophetic utterance, such as breathes through the psalmists and prophets, when he says to Saul in words which, from their poetical form, must have become

fixed in the national memory, "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

(3) The next point is that he is the first of a regular succession of prophets. Samuel planned and set up an institution, so to call it, that has made far more mark on the world than anything else that survives to us out of Israel or Greece or Rome. In his ripe and far-seeing years Samuel devised and founded and presided over a great prophetical school. That school of the prophets, to which we owe so much of Samuel himself, to which we owe David and Gad and Nathan and all their still greater successors—that great school was the creation and the care of Samuel's leisure from office. True, Divine prophecy does not come by the will of man in prophetical schools, or anywhere else. School or no school, holy men of God will always speak as they are moved by the Holy Ghost. No man knew that better than Samuel; but at the same time, no man ever struck out a more fruitful line of action in the things of God than Samuel when he laid the foundation of the sacred school of Ramah. Israel had already a Divine deposit of religion and worship and morality and civilization, all of which they had but to accept and assimilate in order to be the strongest, the safest, and the happiest nation on the face of the earth. But the Divine law was too high and too good for the Israelites. Their hearts were hard, and they were not upright in God's covenant. And the new monarchy was already threatening to become a very stronghold of that hard, worldly, rebellious spirit. Saul, in spite of all that Samuel could do, was soon to become a complete shipwreck. But the throne was destined to stand long after Saul was cast out of it; and Samuel is determined to do his very best to secure that Saul's successors shall have around them and over their people a class of men who, if not indeed prophets, yet shall watch over the religion and the morals of the people, in the prophetical spirit and in the prophetical name. And thus it came about that at Naioth in Ramah the first school of the prophets was set up.

III.

A Life of Intercession.

Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.—1 Sam. xii. 23.

Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name.—Ps. xcix. 6.

1. That Samuel could pray for Israel is a sign that he was himself accepted of the Lord. It is a very great privilege to be permitted to pray for our fellow-men. Prayer in each man's case must necessarily begin with personal petitions, for until the man is himself accepted of God he cannot act as an intercessor for others; and herein lies part of the excellence of intercessory prayer, for it is to the man who exercises it aright a mark of inward grace, and a token for good from the Lord. When the heart is enlarged in believing supplication for others, all doubts about personal acceptance with God may cease; He who prompts us to love has certainly given us that love, and what better proof of His favour do we desire? It is a great advance upon anxiety for our own salvation when we have risen out of the narrowness of dread about ourselves into the broader region of care for a brother's soul. He who, in answer to his intercession, has seen others blessed and saved may take it as a pledge of Divine love, and rejoice in the condescending grace of God. Such prayer rises higher than any petition for ourselves, for only he who is in favour with the Lord can venture upon pleading for others. If we read Samuel's life we see how truly this was the case with him. He was accepted of the Lord to make intercession for others. He was born of prayer. A woman of a sorrowful spirit received him from God, and joyfully exclaimed, "For this child I prayed." He was named in prayer, for, as already observed, his name Samuel signifies "asked of God." Well did he carry out his name and prove its prophetic accuracy, for, having commenced life by being himself asked of God, he continued asking of God, and all his knowledge, wisdom, justice, and power to rule were things which came to him because "asked of God." He was nurtured by a woman of prayer at the first, and when he left her it was to

dwell in the house of prayer all the days of his life. He was born, named, nurtured, housed, and trained in prayer, and he never departed from the way of supplication.

2. Samuel was called upon to undertake the most difficult of all tasks—a task not indeed so great as, but in a real sense almost more difficult than, that of Moses. For, while Moses had created the nation and its faith, Samuel had to recreate them. He had to restore and rebuild out of ruins. It was a task of extraordinary difficulty. To initiate a national and religious life requires the highest original genius, and such had Moses; but to restore them after they have proved unequal to the hopes under the inspiration of which they were initiated requires, if not absolute originality of genius, certainly a faith and a courage and a patience that are hardly anything less. This was what Samuel set himself to do, and did. And what was the beginning of it? The beginning of it was just that simple personal religion which Samuel had learned as a child, and which, as has already been said, he never lost. Samuel as a child had learned to pray, and now, in the great crisis of his own and his nation's fortunes, he "cried unto the Lord for Israel." These prayers were one thing which the sword of the triumphing Philistine could not destroy. They were the sacrifice of incense unto God, which remained even though the altar of the tabernacle was in profane hands. All around was heard the voice of lamentation, as women bewailed the loss of the slain; or of reproach and recrimination, as men blamed one another for their calamities; but here was a voice lifted up, not in futile complaining or bitterness, but in humble repentance and reconsecration, and lifted up, not to despairing man but to God, whose grace was not yet exhausted. When the day of restoration came, few, if any, of the people realized how much it owed to these prayers of Samuel.

¶ When Ethelred, the Saxon king of Northumberland, invaded Wales, and was about to give battle to the Britons, he noticed, near the enemy, a host of unarmed men. He inquired who they were, and what they were doing. He was told that they were the monks of Bangor, praying for the success of their countrymen. "Then," said the Saxon king, "they have begun the fight against us. Attack them first."

3. From his tender regard for his people, as a father for his children, arises the next affliction of Samuel, on the signs of their unbelief in God in asking for a king; and here again is immediately specified the same never-failing remedy for his sorrow. "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord." And what does he then do with their murmurings and obstinate opposition? Did he tell it to his friends, or refer to counsellors for advice? No. "And Samuel," it is said, "heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the Lord." And after he has given them a king, the account of Samuel's dealings with them is very beautiful: he seems by prayer, like Elijah afterwards, to hold as it were the elements—the thunder and the rain—in his hands, and this power he uses not to afflict or punish them, but to warn; indeed his unfailing sympathy and great gentleness, and their confidence in his prayers, form the interesting and very soothing part of the history of those days and that hard people. So much is this the case that he comes out strongly, as representing our Blessed Saviour Himself, standing as mediator between God and man with such a tender feeling for their infirmities. He expostulates—warns, yet at the same time comforts and encourages them—and they look to him. "And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God." "And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: but serve the Lord with all your heart. For the Lord will not forsake his people." And then follow these striking words: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Here he shows that he considered these continual intercessions for them so much a part of his own duty that to omit them would be a sin in him; that not only love to them, but duty to God was in his prayers.

¶ It is said that it is impossible for every one to find out what he or she is to do. It is, of course, impossible to know the whole plan. Hannah could not have guessed that Samuel was to be a judge, a founder of the School of Prophets, the greatest statesman that had been since Moses. All she could see was that he was placed where he could learn the will of God; and this she did. Samuel could not tell what office he would fill, what God would tell him to do, but he could make his life as a temple server complete as possible, and so make himself ready for the next thing.

And faithfulness in little things marks out a man for great things. Consecration is neither easy nor simple. It implies continuous selection; and selection always implies trouble. But it is in the process of selection that the personality grows and is determined. It is in every choice that it takes a fuller shape. As it goes along the path determined of God, it grows into the likeness of His Son; not indeed, that full Image which reflects all the sons of men, but that particular likeness after which it was created. And whether men accomplish much or little, they accomplish that which God intended them to accomplish. So through this determined set of character, this resolute habit of doing from hour to hour that which the Lord wills, Samuel became one of the great personal forces of the world, and especially of his own nation. As Dean Stanley beautifully says: "His long, protracted life was like the shadow of the great rock of an older epoch projected into the level of a modern age. 'He judged Israel all his life': even after the monarchy had sprung up, he was still a witness of an earlier and more primitive state. Whatever murmurs or complaints had arisen were always hushed for the moment before his presence. They leaned upon him; they looked back to him even from after ages, as their fathers had leaned upon Moses. And, when the hour of his death came, we are told with a peculiar emphasis of expression that all the Israelites—not one portion or fragment only, as might have been expected in that time of division and confusion—were gathered together, round him who had been the father of all alike, and lamented him, and buried him not in any sacred spot or secluded sepulchre, but in the midst of the home which he had consecrated only by his own long, unblemished career, 'in his house at Ramah.'"[1]

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 82.

SAMUEL.

II.

In Favour with Men.

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In Favour with Men.

And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.—1 Sam. ii. 26.

Besides being a man of God, Samuel was a man of men. United to his spiritual qualities, there appeared in him those human attributes which are the outcome of all true spirituality. All through his life he knew how to get on with men, because he knew how to get on with God.

I.

Samuel and Eli.

1. As a child Samuel was a dutiful boy. We read of him opening the doors, and lighting the lamps, and doing other things connected with the temple service. He was placed as a son and as a servant under Eli, the head priest of the temple. Let us note this example of his readiness to do what Eli wished: When he heard a voice calling him by name, he answered at once, "Here am I." He did not doubt that it was Eli who had called him. Immediately he got out of bed, and we are told that he ran to Eli to know what it was he wanted him to do. He was surprised when Eli told him he had not called him. But when the priest told him to go back to bed, he went at once and lay down again to sleep. To his amazement the voice came a second time. But Samuel was as ready as before, and went again to Eli. Yet again he was told that Eli had not spoken, and returning to his couch he heard his name called out a third time in the stillness of the night. A third time he got up and went to see what it was, and the priest now knew that it was God who had spoken thus. "Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant

heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came," and spoke to Samuel, and told him of things that were to happen to Eli and to Eli's house.

2. Samuel was dutiful also to God's commands. When Eli asked next morning what God had said to him, Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. Observe exactly how Samuel acted. He did not run to Eli to tell him what had happened, proud of what he had heard, and anxious to grieve the old man by bringing him bad news; but when he was asked, he would not allow any consideration whatever to keep him from telling the truth exactly as it was. Here was a severe test for Samuel. Eli had survived his ministry, and Samuel received the first call to take his place. This was as trying to the sensitive child as to the saintly veteran—perhaps more so. The test came with the call—a test of faith towards God and of fidelity towards Eli. What might not be expected of the lad who responded so soon and so faithfully to the high and trying demands of the occasion, who first kept silent notwithstanding the great pressure of his terrible secret, and then uttered his message with such fidelity and firmness at the call of urgent duty? Having thus spoken to Eli, he will find no difficulty in subsequent life in speaking to the people. This was the crucial moment, when he was to rise to the courage of a prophet.

3. Samuel was kind-hearted towards his protector Eli. He had no wish to cause him distress. Knowing that it would vex him, he "feared to shew Eli the vision." He felt it was not right to keep back anything when Eli asked, "What is the thing that the Lord hath spoken unto thee?" But he felt for Eli, and was not in haste to say what would make him sad. Yet how many are there who are pleased to say something which is unkind, and which they know will hurt the feelings of others? They like to say something that is bitter, and to do something that annoys. Even their jests are often arrows that have poison, and it gives them positive pleasure to see others made unhappy by the things they say and do. Samuel, as a child of God, could not relate his vision to Eli, without feeling how he would suffer. His sense of duty did not dull his sense of human sympathy.

¶ I have known a malignant human being throw in the face of two poor broken-hearted parents the certain truth that their son had fallen into sin and shame, and been compelled to fly his native land; and I have thought that truth may sometimes be spoken in a way that shows the very spirit of the devil in the individual that speaks it. And if, in finding fault with people, young or old, you show that malignant exultation at having found a sore subject,—at having found the place where a touch will always make the poor creature wince, in the wretched remembrance of something wrong or foolish,—it need hardly be said that the truth spoken in that fashion will never do good, but evil. But oh, how different it is if the truth be spoken in love, as St. Paul would have it! If the Christian minister speaks the truth in love; if he speaks as one who is preaching to himself as much as to any other, and who knows he needs to be reminded of all truth as much as any other; if he speaks with that humility wherewith we all should be clothed, and with a heart full of kindly affection towards the flock entrusted by God to him: pointing out errors to be corrected in no fault-finding spirit, and setting forth the terrors of God's law as one whose best prayer is that every one who hears should flee unto Jesus and be safe from them: oh, how much more likely it is that the truth so spoken will go home to the heart, and be honoured by God's good Spirit as the means of converting, edifying, and comforting![1]

¶ One way in which disciples wash one another's feet is by reproving one another. But the reproof must not be couched in angry words, so as to destroy the effect; nor in tame, so as to fail of effect. Just as in washing a brother's feet you must not use boiling water to scald them, nor frozen water to freeze them.[2]

II.

Samuel as King-maker.

i. Samuel and the People.

The firm conviction had grown up among the Israelites that, if they were to hold their own, they must have a more closely-knit national organization, a more intense centralization of public spirit and of public government; in short, they must cease to be tribes, cease to be small communes united together only in the

[1] A. K. H. Boyd, *Sunday Afternoons in a University City*, 227.
[2] D. L. Moody.

presence of a common enemy for a common advantage; they must become a military nation, and to accomplish that they, like others, must have a monarchy. And so they came to Samuel. "The whole system has been found wanting," they said; "a king ruling in the name of Jehovah we must have, if we are to hold our own against the neighbouring nations." But Samuel disapproved. First of all, that demand was a moral and religious declension. It was a confession, on the Israelites' part, that they could not realize the full grandeur of their destiny. It meant a deliberate acceptance of the second best, instead of the very best. Moreover, there were a great many drawbacks to be set against the advantages. The advantages were that undoubtedly Israel would gain in mass and force to withstand attack, that it would be able to develop the internal resources of its own country by this step. United under a king, Israel would moreover be able to seize territory that hitherto had not been conquered by other communities and tribes; it would have an intenser sense of its own national spirit; it would form a wider idea of its own place in the world. Undoubtedly Israel would gain in many ways. But, on the other hand, Israel would lose. Instead of the old independence, the rank and file of the citizens would be reduced to comparative insignificance. That is the great evil always of a strong centralized government, as distinguished from decentralization; and undoubtedly the sum of all social existence should always be to preserve the advantages of a powerful central government, but at the cost of as little sacrifice as possible of local home rule. With a king, court, and metropolis, the equilibrium of the land would be disturbed. A king must make his state magnificent, and taxes must be imposed on farmers and merchants everywhere to support that royal dignity. A standing army, too, must be maintained, and the cost of that would fall on the land. The natural effect of having a king would be to develop large towns; not merely the metropolis, but towns everywhere; also to establish a class of professional governors, of high-born military leaders, of local governors, of tax-collectors. Invariably it has been seen that a people broken up into tribes maintains a considerable uniformity in the distribution of wealth; and that, wherever empires or kingdoms are formed, and a central government is established, we have at once a large development of all

activities, material, industrial, and physical; but at the same time we have a rapid increase of wealth in a few hands and impoverishment of the mass of the people.[1]

1. Note the ill-omened request. A formal delegation of the representatives of the nation comes to Ramah, unsummoned by Samuel, with the demand for a king. There must have been much talk through Israel before the general mind could have been ascertained and this step taken. Not a whisper of what was passing seems to have reached Samuel, and the request is flung at him in harsh language. It is not pleasant for any one, least of all for a ruler, to be told that everybody sees that he is getting old and should provide for what is to come next. Fathers do not like to be told that their sons are disreputable, but Samuel had to hear the bitter truth. The old man was pained by it, and felt that the people were tired of him. His displeasure seems to have been mainly on the ground of the insult to himself in the proposal, and its bearing on the rule of Jehovah over the people does not seem to have occurred to him till it was pointed out by the Divine voice. But, like a good and wise man, he took his perplexity and trouble to God; and there he got light.

2. One of the most magnanimous and majestic and heroic deeds ever done in our world's history was done by Samuel, when, convinced that it was the will of God, he set himself to do what no other man could do—to forsake all his past, to abandon all the lines of action on which he had worked through the best years of his life, and to put into other men's hands fresh possibilities. That meant the condemnation of all his efforts. Think what it was for this great statesman to have seen what was the ideal of his country's greatness, moral and material, to have struggled for a lifetime to give effect to that ideal, to have done a good deal to establish it, and then to have the grandeur, the honesty, the detachment from self and pride to come forward publicly and confess that his whole policy had been a failure; not because it was wrong, but because, through ancient evils making the realization of his high ideal impossible, the only thing that could be done was to accept something inferior. Quite willingly, cordially, and heartily, without himself becoming the leader of the new

[1] W. G. Elmslie.

movement and unsaying all his past, he was ready to do what in him lay, loyally, with God's might and strength, to make the new departure a great success.

¶ Perhaps there is no finer test of obedience than in a recognition of authority when it is contrary to our judgment. It may be that we are told by authority to take a certain action or to give up a certain practice which concerns others as well as ourselves. Obedience will mean a public slight, a humiliation. It is not merely giving up our own will, but humbling ourselves though we feel sure we are right. The enemy will laugh us to scorn. We shall be called "turncoats" or cravens. And just in proportion as our personality is strong we shall feel the pain of obedience. Our obedience will then be worth something. For the obedient is not the spiritless, unintelligent drone that always does what he is told because it is least trouble, because it is easier to obey than not, but the man who, having a will and mind in strong opposition to the voice of authority, puts them under his heel. There are few finer stories of obedience than that of Fénelon, the Prince-Archbishop of Cambrai. When his book was condemned by the Pope and cardinals, a book his own judgment told him to be orthodox and helpful, he accepted the rebuke without a sign of protest. He received the news that the book was proscribed just as he was about to preach to his people in the cathedral. He at once laid aside his sermon, preached on obedience, and showed that he could practise what he preached by the following letter, which he sent to all the clergy:—

"Our Holy Father, the Pope, has condemned the book entitled *Explication des Maximes des Saints* in a brief which is spread abroad everywhere, and which you have already seen. We give our adhesion to this brief, dear brethren, as regards the text of the book and the twenty-three points simply, absolutely, and without a shadow of doubt; and we forbid the faithful of the diocese to read or retain the book. God grant that we may never be spoken of save as a pastor who strove to be more docile than the least sheep of the flock, and whose submission knew no limit. Dear brethren, may the grace of God be with you all. Amen.

"François, Archbishop and Duke of Cambrai."

It must have caused him much suffering to feel that he was looked upon as a heretic, that his enemies were triumphing over his submission; but he felt, and no doubt he was right, that obedience would bring a greater blessing to the Church than any protest.[1]

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 88.

3. Samuel not only worked outwardly for the establishment of the kingdom, but he added his prayers to his actions. Sooner or later the bystanders notice any failure on our part to perform our social duties, but God alone knows whether we pray for our fellows or not. Samuel's prayers were doubtless part of his public work. The Psalmist reckons him among the three great intercessors for Israel—"Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them." But while these official duties of intercession might have been performed, it is also true that Samuel could have continued to act as a religious adviser to Israel without praying secretly for them, and no Israelite would have been a whit the wiser. The old man might have gone in and out among the people, discharging what we call his professional religious duties; but none need have suspected for a moment that he had given up bearing them on his heart before God. "We hardly discover a sin," Donne writes, "when it is but an omission of some good, and no accusing act." This is the worst of sins of omission; they elude our notice, unless our conscience is on the alert. Where do we begin to injure others? Not simply by open acts of indifference or selfishness, but deeper down, in the place of intercession, where the God who entrusts us to one another expects each of us to bear those for whom we are specially responsible in the arms of our faith and love. God hears the snapping of the cords when a human soul breaks loose from the restraints of charity and service. But He also hears—what no one else hears—the dead silence of the heart when prayer is given up. The fear of leaving things undone, and especially a watchfulness against the neglect of prayer upon any pretext, is a cardinal factor in the life of the Christian. Samuel served his fellow-men by committing them to the care of God.

¶ The "closet" was a very small apartment betwixt the other two, having room only for a bed, a little table and a chair, with a diminutive window shedding diminutive light on the scene. This was the sanctuary of that cottage home. Thither daily, and oftentimes a day, generally after each meal, we saw our father retire, and "shut to the door"; and we children got to understand by a sort of spiritual instinct (for the thing was too sacred to be talked about) that prayers were being poured out there for us, as of old by the High Priest within the veil in the Most Holy Place. We

occasionally heard the pathetic echoes of a trembling voice pleading as if for life, and we learned to slip out and in past that door on tiptoe not to disturb the holy colloquy. The outside world might not know, but we knew, whence came that happy light as of a new-born smile that always was dawning on my father's face: it was a reflection from the Divine Presence, in the consciousness of which he lived. Never, in temple or cathedral, on mountain or in glen, can I hope to feel that the Lord God is more near, more visibly walking and talking with men, than under that humble cottage roof of thatch and oaken wattles. Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, or blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, "He walked with God, why may not I?"[1]

ii. Samuel and Saul.

Samuel not only accepted the kingdom, he also accepted the man who represented it. Saul in those days had no better friend than Samuel. All Samuel's past life had been spent in animating and purifying and restoring the republic; but, when he saw that a kingdom was coming in, instead of meeting it with resistance and obstinacy and lifelong hostility, the great man bowed to the will of God and the will of Israel, and cast in his lot with the new dispensation. Samuel had a great struggle with himself to do so; and he did not hide that struggle from Israel. But, that struggle over, Saul had no such loyal and faithful friend as Samuel the deposed judge. The State and Church of Israel had Samuel's service to the end. What there was out of the great past that was worth preserving, he did his best to preserve. What of the old order could safely be carried over into the new order, he did his best to carry over. As far as Samuel was concerned, Saul and his kingdom not only should have fair play, but should have all Samuel's influence with God and with man. It is only a great man and a noble who can act in that way. And the more individuality of character, the more independence of mind, the more strength of will such men have, the nobler is the thing they do.

The magnanimity of the man thus (when once he was per-

[1] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 11.

suaded this was in the line of God's will) giving his mind and his hand, not to the perpetuation of his own lifework, but to the setting up of ways in which that would be entirely eclipsed by others of the coming era—all this is noble beyond praise. He had, indeed, relit a lamp in Israel; but this unselfish, great-minded, and true-hearted old man gave his last days to the lighting of a new lamp whose glory should pale his own. The kings, with all their faults, represent a period far greater and more glorious than that of the judges; yet it was one of these judges who, with a full prevision of that fact, set up the monarchical glory.

> The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
> Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
> I have lived my life, and that which I have done
> May He within himself make pure![1]

1. *The meeting of Samuel and Saul.*—They encounter each other in the gate—the prophet on his way to the sacrifice, the future king with his head full of his humble quest. Samuel knows Saul by Divine intimation as soon as he sees him, but Saul does not know Samuel. What a contrast between the thoughts of the two as they look at each other! Saul begins by consulting Samuel as a magician; he ends by seeking counsel from the witch at Endor. Samuel's words are beautiful in their smothering of all personal feeling, and dignified in their authority. He at once takes command of Saul, and prepares him by half-hints for something great to come. The direction to "go up before me" is a sign of honour. The invitation to the sacrificial feast is another. The promise to disclose his own secret thoughts to Saul may, perhaps, point to some hidden ambitions, the knowledge of which would prove Samuel's prophetic character. The assurance as to the asses answers the small immediate occasion of Saul's resort to him, and the dim hint in the last words of ver. 20, rightly translated, tells him that "all that is desirable in Israel" is for him, and for all his father's house.

2. *The feast.*—Up at the high place was some chamber used for the feasts which followed the sacrifices. A company of thirty

[1] Tennyson, *Idylls of the King.*

—or, according to another reading, of seventy—persons had been invited, and the stately young stranger from Benjamin, with his servant (a trait of the simple manners of these days), is set in the place of honour, where wondering eyes fasten on him. Attention is still more emphatically centred on him when Samuel bids "the cook" bring a part of the sacrifice which he had been ordered to set aside. It proves to be the "shoulder," or "thigh," the priest's perquisite, and therefore probably Samuel's. To give this to another was equivalent to putting him in Samuel's place; and Samuel's words in handing it to Saul make its meaning plain. It is "that which hath been reserved." It has been "kept for thee" till "the appointed time," and that with a view to the assembled guests. All this is in true prophetic fashion, which delighted in symbols, and these of the homeliest sort. The whole transaction expressed the transference of power to Saul, the Divine reserving of the monarchy for him, and the public investiture with it, by the prophet himself.

3. *The private colloquy.*—When the simple feast was over, the strangely assorted pair went down to Samuel's house, and there, on the quiet housetop, where were no curious ears, held long and earnest talk. No doubt Samuel told Saul all that was in his heart, as he had said that he would, and convinced him thereby that it was God who was speaking to him through the prophet. Nor would exhortations and warnings be wanting, which the old man's experience would be anxious to give, and the young one's modesty not unwilling to receive. Saul is a listener, not a speaker, in this unreported interview; and Samuel is in it, as throughout, the superior. Then, as soon as the morning-red began to rise in the east, Samuel sent him away, to secure, as would appear, privacy in his departure. With simple courtesy the prophet accompanied his guest, and as soon as they had got down the hill beyond the last house of the city, he bade Saul send on his servant, that he might speak a last word to him alone. What a contrast in the men! The one has all his long life been true to his first vow, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth," and now has come, in fulness of years and reverenced by all men, near the end of his patient, faithful service. His work is all but done, and his heart is quiet in the peace which is the best reward of loving and doing

God's law. Ripened wisdom, calm trust, unhesitating submission cast a glory round the old man, who is now performing the supreme act of self-abnegation of his lifetime, and, not without a sense of relief, is laying the burden, so long and uncomplainingly borne, on the great shoulders of this young giant. The other has a humble past of a few years rapidly sinking out of his dazzled sight, and is in a whirl of emotion at the startling suddenness of his new dignity. We have no difficulty in recognizing which is the better man, and this makes Samuel's sacrifice all the greater.

4. A further proof of this tender sympathizing spirit of the good Samuel, and the estimation in which he was held as a protector and Divine shield, may be seen in *the conduct of Saul towards him.* The sad king clings as it were to the skirt of his mantle for refuge from his own evil self, and the evil spirits that haunt him; and even after Samuel's death, in his great distress he still looks to and longs for Samuel. Throughout, the compassion and parent-like pity of Samuel seems to have had an impression on his proud heart. He asks him not for his prayers, but clings to his protection, as if in Samuel himself resided the power of sheltering him. And how affecting is that description of Samuel, when he "came no more to see Saul, until the day of his death," that he "mourned for Saul," praying for him in secret, though he saw him no more, and continuing long to do so, till God said to him, "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul?" and told him that there was another answer to his prayers, in the man after God's own heart, not in Saul.

¶ Don't let us rejoice in punishment, even when the hand of God alone inflicts it. The best of us are but poor wretches just saved from shipwreck: can we feel anything but awe and pity when we see a fellow-passenger swallowed by the waves?[1]

¶ The hopeless faithfulness of love that meets with no response, whether it be in Lord Durrisdeer's son or in the disfigured wife of a heartless artisan in the Portobello train; the homelessness of those who have by their own fault alienated friendship; the hapless plight of all "sinful men walking before the Lord among the sins and dangers of this life"—all these fill Stevenson's heart with tears. Still more does he feel, and make his readers feel, the pity of it, when a good man has degenerated

[1] George Eliot, *Janet's Repentance.*

from his former character, and we remember the brave fight he once made against the temptation he no longer resists—"Was not this a thing at once to rage and to be humbled at? . . . I was overborne with a pity almost approaching the passionate, not for my master alone, but for the sons of man."[1]

iii. Samuel and David.

The house of Saul rallied only for a little while after his death, under his son Ishbosheth (Esh-baal), at Mahanaim beyond the Jordan. Any promise of success the dying cause had was due chiefly to the activity and influence of Saul's astute and strenuous cousin, Abner. But Abner ere long fell a victim to the jealous and vengeful anger of Joab; and Ishbosheth himself, for whose deposition Abner had already been in parley with David, also fell before the assassin's knife. And the house of Saul, which had been growing weaker and weaker before, had to yield utterly before the waxing power and splendour of the house of David. Then, under a king who was loyal to Jehovah, and on whom the personal influence of the prophet Samuel made itself felt, Samuel's idea of a theocracy was realized, although the regal form of government was one which he had not been at first prepared to welcome. The fruit of Samuel's faithfulness still appeared, after he himself was dead, in the prosperity and glory of the reign of the son of Jesse. Where Saul, false to Samuel's principles, had been only a splendid failure, David, true to these principles, became under God a splendid success.

¶ It is a relief to turn from the darkness of Saul's character to the glory of David's. David is one of the surprises of the Old Testament. No one ever expected anything of him; no one thought that he was likely to be Israel's greatest king. The youngest son of an undistinguished family, set to the inglorious task of shepherding—usually allotted to the slaves, females, or despised of the family—known chiefly as a dreamy lad, quite unfit for practical service, he was no more likely than Jacob to be a leader of men. Samuel can hardly believe that this stripling, called hastily from his flocks, is to be the Anointed of the Lord. And David himself never got over it. That he, a shepherd boy, should be placed on the throne of a mighty empire, that he should be the Anointed—the Messiah Prince, type of a Greater to come—anointed by Samuel of God, seemed an impossible dream. And

[1] John Kelman, *The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 206.

yet, here again, the unexpected happens: David, with all his disadvantages, soon outstrips Saul. And the one characteristic which shines out so clearly in his character is his obedience.[1]

III.

The Integrity of Samuel.

Here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand.—1 Sam. xii. 3, 4.

1. In pondering over this declaration of Samuel, we must bear in mind, first of all, that Samuel is standing on his defence before his fellow-men. He is not addressing God. He is not to be likened to the Pharisee, professing to pray in the temple, and yet saying, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers." Samuel would have been the last man in the world to approach the Almighty with a pompous statement of his good deeds. His prayer would ever have been—"God be merciful to me a sinner." He would have said that, after all, he was but an unprofitable servant, for he had left undone many things which he ought to have done. But Samuel is here addressing his *fellow-men*. He is on his defence, as it were. He had been a public man for half a century, he had served his country faithfully, and now they were forgetting an old servant, who had served them right loyally. They were slighting their old friend, who had stood true to them before God and man, and had saved them in many an hour of peril. His countrymen were passing him over, and were wanting to have this young king; and while Samuel, by God's permission, humours them in their request, he speaks out his mind manfully, stands on his defence, and challenges them to lay anything to his charge.

¶ Samuel might have applied to himself the words of old Adam in *As You Like It*:

[1] G. H. S. Walpole, *Personality and Power*, 94.

Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty;
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility;
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly: let me go with you;
I'll do the service of a younger man
In all your business and necessities.

2. All the people, with one consent, cried: "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand." But the old man was not content; he wanted to bind the people by a solemn oath, as in the very sight of God and the king; and, therefore, he said, lifting his hand to heaven, "The Lord is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found aught in my hand." And again, from the lips of all the people, with a unanimous shout, there came the response, "He is witness." The old man was comforted, and added, "It is the Lord that appointed Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt." He was not afraid of being judged by God.

3. Samuel challenged any charge against himself or his administration. He called both the Lord and His anointed to witness to what had passed between him and the people. But, as a faithful servant of the Lord, and ruler in Israel, he went further. Fain would he bring them to repentance for their great sin in the manner wherein they had demanded a king. One by one he recalled to them the "righteous doings" of Jehovah in the fulfilment of His covenant-promises in the past. In contrast to this never-failing help, he pointed to their unbelief, when, unmindful of what God had done and distrustful of what He would do, they had, on the approach of serious danger, virtually said concerning His leadership, "Nay, but a king shall reign over us." And God had granted their desire. But upon their and their king's bearing towards the Lord, not upon the fact that they had now a king, would the future of Israel depend. And this truth, so difficult for them to learn, God would now, as it were, *prove* before them in a symbol. Did they think it unlikely, even well-

nigh impossible, to fail in their present circumstances? God would bring the unlikely and seemingly incredible to pass in a manner patent to all. Was it not the time of wheat-harvest, when in the east not a cloud darkens the clear sky? God would send thunder and rain to convince them, by making the unlikely real, of the folly and sin of their thoughts in demanding a king. So manifest a proof of the truth of what Samuel had said, and of the nearness of God and of His personal interposition, struck terror into the hearts of the people, and led to at least outward repentance. In reply to their confession and entreaty for his continued intercession, Samuel assured them that he would not fail in his duty of prayer for them, nor would God, either in His faithfulness to His covenant and promises, or in His justice and holiness if they did wickedly. And so the assembly parted—the Israelites to their tents, Saul to the work of the kingdom which lay to his hands, and Samuel to the far more trying and difficult duty of faithfully representing and executing the will of God as His appointed messenger in the land.

¶ Besides instructing their successors in the art of carrying on a popular movement, Wilberforce and his followers had a lesson to teach, the value of which not so many perhaps will be disposed to question. In public life, as in private, they habitually had the fear of God before their eyes. A mere handful as to number, and in average talent very much on a level with the mass of their colleagues;—counting in their ranks no orator, or minister, or boroughmonger;—they commanded the ear of the House, and exerted on its proceedings an influence the secret of which those who have studied the parliamentary history of the period find it only too easy to understand. To refrain from gambling and ball-giving, to go much to church and never to the theatre, was not more at variance with the social customs of the day than it was the exception in the political world to meet with men who looked to the facts of the case and not to the wishes of the minister, and who before going into the Lobby required to be obliged with a reason instead of with a job. Confidence and respect, and (what in the House of Commons is their unvarying accompaniment) power, were gradually, and to a great extent involuntarily, accorded to this group of members. They were not addicted to crotchets, nor to the obtrusive and unseasonable assertion of conscientious scruples. The occasions on which they made proof of independence and impartiality were such as justified, and dignified, their temporary renunciation of party ties.

They interfered with decisive effect in the debates on the great scandals of Lord Melville and the Duke of York, and in more than one financial or commercial controversy that deeply concerned the national interests, of which the question of the retaining the Orders in Council was a conspicuous instance. A boy who, like young Macaulay, was admitted to the intimacy of politicians such as these, and was accustomed to hear matters of State discussed exclusively from a public point of view without any afterthought of ambition, or jealousy, or self-seeking, could hardly fail to grow up a patriotic and disinterested man. "What is far better and more important than all is this, that I believe Macaulay to be incorruptible. You might lay ribbons, stars, garters, wealth, titles before him in vain. He has an honest genuine love of his country, and the world would not bribe him to neglect her interests." Thus said Sydney Smith, who of all his real friends was the least inclined to overpraise him.[1]

The Man, who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a Nation's eye,
Or left unthought-of in obscurity,—
Who, with a toward or untoward lot,
Prosperous or adverse, to his wish or not—
Plays, in the many games of life, that one
Where what he most doth value must be won:
Whom neither shape of danger can dismay,
Nor thought of tender happiness betray;
Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpast:
Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead unprofitable name—
Finds comfort in himself and in his cause;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause:
This is the happy Warrior; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be.[2]

[1] *Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, chap. i.
[2] Wordsworth, *Character of the Happy Warrior.*

SAUL.

I.

Saul and Samuel.

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Saul and Samuel.

And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death: nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul: and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.—1 Sam. xv. 35.

It is one of the many signs of the reality and truthfulness of Scripture history, that the examples most held up for our warning are not those of the worst men, but those of persons in whom there has been a doubtful conflict between good and evil, and the evil has ultimately prevailed; or of men who, having been placed in the midst of high privileges and responsibilities, have fallen back on their ordinary characters and natural enjoyments, and despised their loftier calling. To the latter of these classes belongs Esau, whose character is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews for our avoidance; to the former belongs Saul, the first king of Israel. As if to throw a stronger light on the character of the unhappy Saul by comparison or contrast, the Scriptures present him along with Samuel, the man of prayer, with David, the man after God's own heart, with his son Jonathan, so lovely yet so truly great. Saul might have prayed like Samuel, might have waited upon God as David did, might have loved with largeness of heart like Jonathan. But his story is the story of the downward progress of the soul; his life is a succession of gradual changes, and in his successive trials evil prevails over the spirit of grace and opportunities of good. As a day that begins with sunshine and then clouds over gloomily and at last closes with a storm, so is the life of Saul. He is the most tragic character in the Old Testament records; historically tragic in the solitary awfulness of his might and the unutterable pathos of his fall; yet more ethically tragic, a soul of noblest endowments and highest aspirations struggling against and overborne by surroundings, duties, claims, to which his nature was unequal. It is the theme of the old Greek tragedians; they lay it on an irresistible,

cruel, overruling Fate. It is the theme of Shakespeare; he bares the springs of moral and mental weakness causing it. It is the theme of the Hebrew historian; he sees in it the contest between a good and an evil spirit from the Lord.

I.

Israel's Chosen King.

There was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he.—1 Sam. ix. 2.

Saul is the first king of Israel. In him that new and strange idea became impersonated. In him we feel that we have made a marked advance in the history—from the patriarchal and nomadic state, which concerns us mainly by its contrast with our own, to that fixed and settled state which has more or less prevailed ever since.

But, although in outward form Saul belonged to the new epoch, although even in spirit he from time to time threw himself into it, yet on the whole he is a product of the earlier condition. Whilst Samuel's existence comprehends and overlaps both periods in the calmness of a higher elevation, the career of Saul derives its peculiar interest from the fact that it is the eddy in which both streams converge. In that vortex he struggles, the centre of events and persons greater than himself; and in that struggle he is borne down, and lost.

i. Israel's demand for a king.

1. Hitherto the nation of Israel had been under a pure theocracy. The invisible God was their only King. When the nation was obedient to His commandments, the land had rest and prosperity, God in His providence protected and blessed them; but when they were disobedient, He chastised them—generally by permitting one or more of the surrounding nations to oppress them. Then, when they repented and "cried unto the Lord," the Lord raised up judges to deliver them. The nation, however, was no longer satisfied with this mode of government. The general discontent was focussed by a raid of the barbarian Nahash, chieftain of Ammon, whose alarming movements on the unpro-

tected eastern frontier of Israel urgently brought home the need of a warrior king to lead them out to battle. They were restless under what they, through their lack of faith, considered to be the painful uncertainty of having to fall back in times of great emergency upon a judge whom God specially raised up at such times to deliver them. They desired to have all the certainty which they associated with having a king always with them, after the manner of the surrounding nations. Doubtless the idea of the kingdom had long floated before the mind of Israel; it was suggested by the customs of other nations. But hitherto the necessity for it had not been so keenly felt. Earlier attempts, like that of Gideon's son, Abimelech, had resulted in little more than a tribal kingship. The decline of the tribal sentiment favoured the growth of a wider national aspiration, and paved the way to the realization of the ideal. The present crisis and the burden of the common oppression forced matters to a head. The salvation of the State now clearly lay in political unity, and a movement began in Israel which favoured the establishment of a monarchy. "Then," as the sacred historian informs us, "all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

2. That Samuel should be gravely displeased was only natural. The reflection upon his sons was indirectly also a reflection upon himself, and, moreover, he may well have doubted if the request was consistent with loyalty to the Covenant-God. But when he brought the matter before the Lord, the Lord said to him, "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them." At first sight it seems a little strange that God should command Samuel to hearken to the voice of the people, while yet protesting solemnly to them that in this request they had rejected, not Samuel, but the Lord. Yet the meaning should be plain. Jehovah was Israel's God, and though the appointment of a human ruler might be quite consistent with this, and is indeed presupposed in the earlier code, yet that human ruler should be a theocratic king, wielding an authority

which was at all times the carrying out of God's wish, devoid of all wish for mere personal aggrandizement, but doing all in his power at all times for the good of the people whom God had entrusted to him. Not such was the king in the mind of the people. Clearly they were blamed, not for the fact that they had asked for a king, but because they pictured to themselves a king who was simply like any other Eastern despot, a king who practically dethroned God from the sovereignty of Israel. It was the very glory of Israel that they were not like the nations, yet to be ruled by Jehovah seemed as nothing. Samuel's appeal to them, however, failed, and God granted their request.

¶ Much sorry stuff, written some hundred years ago or more, about the "Divine Right of Kings," moulders unread now in the Public Libraries of this country. Far be it from us to disturb the calm process by which it is disappearing harmlessly from the earth, in those repositories! At the same time, not to let the immense rubbish go without leaving us, as it ought, some soul of it behind—I will say that it did mean something; something true, which it is important for us and all men to keep in mind. To assert that in whatever man you chose to lay hold of (by this or the other plan of clutching at him); and clapt a round piece of metal on the head of, and called King,—there straightway came to reside a divine virtue, so that *he* became a kind of god, and a Divinity inspired him with faculty and right to rule over you to all lengths: this—what can we do with this but leave it to rot silently in the Public Libraries? But I will say withal, and that is what these Divine-Right men meant, That in Kings, and in all human Authorities, and relations that men god-created can form among each other, there is verily either a Divine Right or else a Diabolic Wrong; one or the other of these two! For it is false altogether, what the last Sceptical Century taught us, that this world is a steam-engine. There is a God in this world; and a God's-sanction, or else the violation of such, does look-out from all ruling and obedience, from all moral acts of men. There is no act more moral between men than that of rule and obedience. Woe to him that claims obedience when it is not due; woe to him that refuses it when it is![1]

3. The granting to Israel of the king whom they desired is but one instance of the law which is exemplified in God's dealing with nations and individuals according to which He lets them

[1] Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship.*

have their own way, that they may "be filled with their own devices." He who governed the Israelites, who was their real King, taught His judge and prophet that he was not to resist the craving of the people—though it was a self-willed, idolatrous, mischievous craving—to have a ruler of their armies who should make them like the nations round about; that he was to yield to them and let them have their way. And now, it is said, God appointed the king who would answer to the desires of this people, who was the kind of man that they had conceived of,—cast in their own mould, distinguished from them chiefly by mere outward superiority,—the very person who would cause them to experience that which it was absolutely necessary for them to experience.

¶ I have been amazed and even stupefied sometimes to consider how my own little petty, foolish, whimsical desires have been faithfully and literally granted me. We most of us do really translate into fact what we desire, and as a rule we only fail to get the things which we have not desired enough. It is true indeed that we often find that what we desired was not worth getting; and we ought to be more afraid of our desires, not because we shall not get them, but because we shall almost certainly have them fulfilled. For myself I can only think with shame how closely my present conditions do resemble my young desires, in all their petty range, their trivial particularity. I suppose I have unconsciously pursued them, chosen them, grasped at them; and the shame of it is that if I had desired better things, I should assuredly have been given them. I see, or seem to see, the same thing in the lives of many that I know. What a man sows he shall reap! That is taken generally to mean that if he sows pleasure, he shall reap disaster; but it has a much truer and more terrible meaning than that—namely, that if a man sows the seed of small, trivial, foolish joys, the grain that he reaps is small, trivial, and foolish too. God is indeed in many ways an indulgent Father, like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son; and the best rebuke that He gives, if we have the wisdom to see it, is that He so often does hand us, with a smile, the very thing we have desired.[1]

ii. The Call of Saul.

1. Very romantic were the circumstances in which Saul was called to be the first king of Israel. It was while he was seeking

[1] A. C. Benson, *Joyous Gard*, 90.

the strayed asses of his father, and had wandered far from home in search of them, over a region in which he was a complete stranger. Hearing that the prophet of Israel lived in one of the hill villages to the foot of which he happened to come, he climbed up the steep slope, and met him half-way. Samuel was told in a secret communication from the Lord that this was the man whom He had chosen to set over His people as their first king. Setting Saul's mind at rest as to the lost asses, he brought him to the high place, and gave him an honoured seat at the feast. They then descended to the city, and there Samuel poured over Saul's head the consecrated oil, and with a kiss of salutation announced to him that he was to be the ruler and deliverer of the nation. Samuel's solemn words fell on willing ears; Saul's ambition was fired, and his spirit was prepared for the future that lay before him. He departed home with "another heart"—with a quickened patriotic ambition, and with something added of the seer's religious fervour.

This is what may be called the private, inner view of his call. His anointing was thus far a secret known only to Samuel and himself.

¶ How many a born king spends his whole life in the pursuit of asses for want of some kind prophet to tell him he is a head and shoulders taller than other people.[1]

¶ Now no man can define or describe for another man the likeness and fashion of the Divine vocation. No man's circumstances are exactly commensurate with another's, and the nature of our circumstances gives distinctiveness and originality to our call. Moreover, the Lord honours our individuality in the very uniqueness of the call He addresses to us. The singularity of our circumstances and the awful singularity of our souls provide the medium through which we hear the voice of the Lord. How strangely varied are the "settings" through which the Divine voice determines the vocations of men, as they are recorded in the Scriptures![2]

> We must fare forth, unsped,
> From homely board and bed;
> We must set sail for port unknown,
> On an uncharted course, alone.

[1] M. E. Coleridge, *Gathered Leaves*, 226.
[2] J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, 7.

Push off. We have to go,
Whether we choose or no.
The Call, though faint and far away,
Has reached us, and we must obey.

What will the voyage cost?
We are already lost
Who turn from land and love, to face
This blank immensity of space.

Push out. We have to go,
Whether we fear or no.
And why stand shivering and appalled?
We go because the Voice has called.

What matters where we go?
We do not ask to know.
He called us, and we came. The quest
For us is ended, and we rest.[1]

2. But there was another, an outer, call, which is related independently. An assembly was convened by Samuel at Mizpeh, and lots (so often practised at that time) were cast to find the tribe and the family which was to produce the king. Saul was named, and was found hid in the circle of baggage which surrounded the encampment. His stature at once conciliated the public feeling, and for the first time in Israel the shout was raised, afterwards so often repeated down to modern times, "Long live the king!"

There is nothing that so often oversets the whole balance of a mind, that brings out at once faults unsuspected before, as a sudden and abrupt elevation from a very low to a very high position. Now, there has seldom been a more abrupt elevation than was Saul's. But he gives no token, at all events at the outset of his career, that it has wrought this mischief in him. The Lord's anointed, Israel's king, he bides his time, returns with a true simplicity to humblest offices in his father's house. He would gladly, and that out of a genuine modesty, hide and withdraw himself from the people's choice. At every step of Samuel's revelations he had been taken by surprise. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family

[1] Ada Cambridge, *The Hand in the Dark*, 40.

the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" The ceremony over, all things seemingly lapsed back into the old quiet, and Saul returned to his herd, like Cincinnatus to his plough. There was just a little temporary upheaval of feeling. Though a band of valiant men loyally gathered round the young king and accompanied him home, certain "sons of Belial," worthless fellows, as the phrase means, derided what had been done, and refused the customary homage. Amid all this, Saul wisely said and did nothing; he behaved as though he were deaf.

¶ His patience and tolerance as a speaker argued magnificent self-control in a man of Morris's temperament. The violent criticisms of other Socialists never disturbed him, as it would have done a more self-centred man. At one of the West London meetings, a well-known anarchist got up and accused him of "talking —— nonsense!" Morris did not comment; he went on with his speech, and at the close, when those around him on the platform fully expected he would turn and rend the interrupter, he went up to him, took his arm, and invited him back to supper and a chat. He knew the man was a genuine man behind all his violence. He was willing to talk the matter out as man to man, and this individual became one of his greatest admirers. He knew how few would have treated him as Morris did. Morris's friends never lost their self-respect. They knew they could be outspoken, and that it was not necessary, as it is with some, to be sycophantic or self-effacing to retain his consideration.[1]

3. Even after this public ratification of his private call, Saul did not assert his royal dignity; but all at once came a startling incident which changed his apparent torpor into fierce activity. After a long day's work, as he climbed with his oxen the steep ascent to the city a sudden summons came to him. A loud wail, so characteristic of Eastern peoples, struck his ear, and on inquiring the cause, he learnt that their old enemies, the Ammonites, had fallen upon the men of Jabesh. In a moment the patriotism of Saul was aroused. The spirit of God came upon him, and, hewing in pieces two of his oxen, he sent their bones through the country—just as in the Scottish Highlands the Fiery Cross as a signal for war used to be passed from hand to hand—with the significant warning, "Whosoever cometh not forth

[1] A. Compton-Rickett, *William Morris: A Study in Personality*, 238.

after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen." The fear of the Lord came upon the people; they rose as one man, and the Ammonites were so completely defeated and scattered "that two of them were not left together."

It was a great and timely victory, and it placed Saul on the very pinnacle of greatness. Many clamoured for those who had opposed Saul to be put to death, but the then virtuous king would not hear of it. He said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to-day the Lord hath wrought deliverance in Israel." Saul was now seated securely on the throne. The east of the Jordan was regarded as his special conquest. The people of Jabesh never forgot their debt of gratitude. The house of Saul were safe there when their cause was ruined everywhere else.

In the joy of their great victory the tribes gathered at Gilgal, between Jericho and the Jordan, one of their ancient mustering-places. There they hailed Saul as their king, and solemnly ratified their election by offering public sacrifice to the God of Israel. The assembly at Gilgal marks an important epoch in Jewish history. It ratified the work of the assembly at Mizpeh, finally closed the period of the judges, and formally inaugurated the new monarchy. Samuel, though he was still to retain his influence and authority as prophet, now resigned his office as judge, and in doing so delivered a solemn address to the assembled people.

¶ The Hebrews believed that in every just quarrel the Lord of hosts was with them, that they were fighting the battles of the Lord, whose spirit came upon them to arouse them to action, who taught their hands to war and their fingers to fight, who girded them with strength for battle, who went forth with their hosts, whose right hand and holy arm got Him the victory. Their true successors are the Christian soldiers of to-day who contend for justice and liberty and humanity. Dan, the scene of Abram's triumph, was the first of many fields of honour in Canaan—Jericho, Michmash, Bethhoron, Kishon, Mizpeh, Jezreel, Bethbarah, Aphek—where the Hebrews won great victories, renowned in legend and song. The memories of battles fought for liberty are among a nation's best traditions, and consecrate a land scarcely less than its altars. The appropriate limits of the Holy Land—Dan and Beersheba—were a battlefield and a shrine. Valour and faith are the springs of all that is most glorious and inspiring in a nation's

history. To use Samuel Johnson's well-known words, "The man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."[1]

II.

Trial and Downfall.

Thou hast done foolishly; . . . thy kingdom shall not continue.—1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14.

1. For two years Saul prospered as king over Israel, under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Then came his time of trial. The time had arrived for the children of Israel to throw off the heavy yoke of the Philistines. The victory was to be won by Saul, but in strict obedience to Jehovah's leading, as given through His prophet. Either at the time of the anointing, or at some later interview not recorded, Samuel had closely connected the instruction of 1 Sam. x. 8 with a muster at Gilgal for the march against the Philistines. Jonathan, in the spirit of his daring deed at Michmash a little later, threw down the gauntlet to the enemy by destroying a trophy erected by them at Geba. The Philistines mustered to avenge the insult, and the Israelites gathered at their chief's command more like sheep going to the slaughter than warriors assured of victory. Saul found himself at Gilgal confronted by an increased and increasing band of Philistines, with his own army an unarmed and disorganized rabble, panic-stricken, demoralized, and constantly deserting. And here he was hampered by a tiresome restriction put upon him by Samuel, to wait for him seven days, until he came to offer sacrifice for him and the army.

It was a hard task, worse by far than the similar inaction Divinely commanded at Jericho a few generations before. Here is a king who had been made king for the express purpose of destroying the Philistines; he is in the presence of his powerful enemy; he is anxious to fulfil his commission; he fears to fail; his reputation is at stake; he has at best a most difficult task, as his soldiers are very bad ones, and are all afraid of the enemy. His only chance, humanly speaking, is to strike a blow; if he

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 55.

delays, he can expect nothing but total defeat; the longer he delays, the more frightened his men will become. Yet he is told to wait seven days.

It is hard to blame Saul for failing in the test which the prophet imposed on him, when he persistently delayed till the end of the seven days. A severer trial could not have been devised for a man with military instincts, who had to watch the opportunity slipping away under his eyes. And Saul nearly stood the test. The set time seems to have been nearly up when the king, unable to bear it any longer, and unwilling to attack without securing Jehovah's aid, conquered his conscience with an effort and bade the attendants bring forward the victims.

There was some excuse, considerable temptation, no slight admixture of better motives, some superstition, some religion, some sense of the necessity of God's help, much neglect of God's directions as to the proper way of securing it. Saul showed that he could not wait for God in absolute faith that He would not fail or deceive. He was careful to maintain an outward rite, but the spirit of devotion and faith was altogether wanting. As he was, his successors would become, to the undoing of Israel; therefore his kingdom could not continue.

For anticipating the prophet's arrival by perhaps not more than an hour, Saul is told that he has forfeited his crown. But it would appear that this was not the first act of self-will on his part. It was one of a series, manifesting the tendency of the man to emancipate himself altogether from God's law and make himself supreme; to follow his own bent and natural impulse, to the setting aside of God's positive command. He owns to having forced his own conscience; he acted against the inward warning; he resisted the Spirit of God; he preferred his own thoughts to the express command of the prophet; he had light, and he chose darkness, because his heart was not with God.

¶ I have never forgotten a clever answer given by one of our witnesses—Mrs. Kennedy, a mistress of novices—to Coleridge. Coleridge's case was that the breaches of discipline were trivial, contemptible. He pressed Mrs. Kennedy on the point, asking what had Miss Taurin done. Mrs. Kennedy said, as an example, that she had eaten strawberries. "Eaten strawberries!" exclaimed Coleridge, "what harm was there in that?" "It was forbidden, sir!" said

Mrs. Kennedy—a very proper answer. "But Mrs. Kennedy," retorted Coleridge, "what trouble was likely to come from eating strawberries?" "Well, sir," replied Mrs. Kennedy, "you might ask what trouble was likely to come from eating an apple, yet we know what trouble did come from it!" The answer floored Coleridge. He threw himself back on his seat and laughed. The whole Court laughed. Ultimately, the jury found a verdict for the plaintiff.[1]

> Ah! for the simple guileless faith
> That raves not at the bolts of fate;
> Ah! for the patient tongue that saith,
> "Though late he cometh, not too late!"
> The heart that beats in coolest rhyme
> With "God's good time," and "in God's good time."[2]

2. As we advance, we see the self-willed man coming more and more into prominence. His own son Jonathan had wrought a mighty deliverance of Israel from their oppressors the Philistines. Yet he was with difficulty rescued from being put to death, because his father had made a rash vow, which he had unwittingly broken through.

The second test was of a different kind. Saul was sent to exterminate the Amalekites, whose relentless hostility had begun with the Exodus and had continued ever since. For his own purposes, and because he chose to be wiser than God, he listened to the voice of the people and spared the spoil of Amalek. The king of Amalek also he spared to grace his triumph. When accused by Samuel, he put himself on the defensive: justified his conduct, or laid the blame of it upon others. The king, who pretended to keep the booty for the purpose of offering sacrifice to the Lord his God, was evidently beginning to play the hypocrite; to make the service of God an excuse for acts of selfishness, and so to introduce all that is vilest in kingcraft as well as in priestcraft. Samuel the prophet was not trying to keep alive the habits which these names express, that he might maintain the dignity of his own office. That office enjoined him to bear the most emphatic protest against them. He was bound to tell Saul, that, if he forgot that he was a servant and fancied himself absolute, the kingdom would be rent from him and given to another.

[1] R. Barry O'Brien, *Life of Lord Russell of Killowen.*
[2] Edmund Gosse, *In Russet and Silver.*

¶ Not without good reason was Christ's only harsh and threatening reproof directed against hypocrites and hypocrisy. It is not theft, nor robbery, nor murder, nor fornication, but falsehood, the special falsehood of hypocrisy, which corrupts men, brutalizes them and makes them vindictive, destroys all distinction between right and wrong in their conscience, deprives them of what is the true meaning of all human life, and debars them from all progress towards perfection.[1]

3. Saul was no monster who had won power by false means and then plunged at once into a reckless abuse of it, no apostate who had cast off the belief in God, and set up some Ammonite or Phœnician idol. He merely forgot the Lord and the teacher who had imparted to him that new life and inspiration; he merely failed to remember that he was under a law and that he had a vocation. A certain command was given him and he set about obeying it. But his obedience was partial and incomplete. The order was not entirely executed. It was partly done and partly undone; the Lord's pleasure was sought, as well as the pleasure of man. Saul tried to serve God and mammon. He would go a little on the way of obedience, and then he would leap the fence, and hold a little fellowship with the devil. He assumed that the Lord would be satisfied with the beginnings of obedience, and would pardon a small remnant of personal desire. It was like a man who has had small-pox in the house, and who was ordered to burn all the affected garments, but who decided to keep just one coat, and to burn all the rest! But to retain a rag is to allow the sovereignty of disease; and to have even a slight communion with the Evil One is to pay homage to his throne.

This second manifestation of self-will in Israel's king drew from Samuel a stern rebuke—the death-warrant of the royalty of Saul's house—"Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." But his punishment did not affect Saul aright: he did not say, with the patriarch, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"; but he exclaimed, "I have sinned: yet,"—yet what?—yet pardon me? No; this is not his chief thought; no, it is, "yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people." God's pardon is not what he seeks.

[1] Tolstoy.

Ambition and power, these are the shrines upon which he will offer incense, these the sole deities he cares to propitiate. It is the cry not of a penitent, but of a fugitive from justice; not hating his sin, but dreading its result; eager at any cost to keep the crown on his brow and the empire in his hand; afraid of the consequences which might ensue if his leading men detected any break or coolness between himself and the prophet. Even at that moment, had Saul thrown himself at God's feet and asked for pardon, he would have been accepted and forgiven. Even though as a monarch his kingdom might have passed from him, as a man he would have received pardon. But his only thought was to stand well with the people, and he was prepared to make any confession of wrong-doing as a price of Samuel's apparent friendship.

From the time of his disobedience in the matter of Amalek, Samuel came no more to see Saul, whose season of probation was over. The light that he had refused to follow was put out, the voice that he had declined to hear was silenced, the person that had represented high and holy refreshment and influence was removed, because he ignored his sacred help; the spiritual friend whom he declined to follow was lost to him and was never seen again till in his deep degradation, in the utter terror of his soul, in the presence of a witch, while his flesh crept with horror and his hair stood on end, the saintly image of his friend, the impersonation of all that was good in his life, called from the world of spirits by the wretched man, rose before him paralysed and speechless.

¶ Something also I would say to the school on the subject of school greatness. I have observed lately no unnatural desire [on the part of Uppingham] to claim a position among English schools. Now you cannot claim it. It must come. Indeed we are very far from wishing that the school should come forward on the false ground of mere increase of numbers—which may be an increase of shame, for a mob is not an army—or of mere identity with other schools, which is not what has made us what we are. Yet be sure there is the means here of being great. Have you so soon forgotten the motto in your head-room—

> Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,—
> These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

Yes, power must come, and there are two ways for it to come. Most of all, and first, the winning a character for truth and true

honour. Most of all, that no lie in word or deed, no shams, no underhand deceits shall harbour here—nothing that will not bear the light. Let this be the school character, as I trust it is, and fear not the school *is* great.[1]

Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it? here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
This perfection,—succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now—and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life,—a new harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended—who knows?—or endure!
The man taught enough, by life's dream, of the rest to make sure:
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.[2]

[1] *Life and Letters of Edward Thring*, i. 134.
[2] Browning, *Saul*.

SAUL.

II.

Saul and David.

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Saul and David.

And David came to Saul, and stood before him : and he loved him greatly ; and he became his armourbearer.—1 Sam. xvi. 21.

And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I : for thou hast rendered unto me good, whereas I have rendered unto thee evil.—1 Sam. xxiv. 17.

We now turn to the passages in the history of Saul which properly belong to David. And first of all we have to look at Saul's fear and jealousy of the young man concerning whom the virgins of Israel sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." There are many ways of describing how such a passion as this enters into the soul and takes a direction towards a person who had once been loved,—is baffled for a while, sometimes gives way to fits of returning affection, then absorbs the man completely,—till it becomes an ungoverned frenzy prompting the most extravagant and ferocious acts. But one who is considering the subject in earnest, trying to turn it to account for himself and his fellow-men, will do well to pause before he abandons the language in which the Bible speaks of this awful mental process and takes up any other. It tells us that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him."

I.

The Evil Spirit.

1. The breach with the prophet Samuel was ominous for Saul. It was a breach with what was best in the religious life of the nation. It was a sign that Saul was moving away from the better principles that first actuated him; it was the first cloud of the gathering storm that was soon to sweep over his life, darkening his mind, and marring the natural nobility of his character.

Darker tints soon accumulated. The outward monitor was followed in his departure by the inward monitor also. God's Holy Spirit, grieved, quenched, insulted, departed from Saul. An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. It is a remarkable fact that nearly all the worst deeds of Saul's life occurred after the period to which this description belongs. But already there must have been an inner change of a very decisive kind, before such words could have been applicable. Whatever there was of evil in his life sprang from a moral change, and was not the mere result of circumstances. Saul's character had begun to deteriorate; a divorce had taken place between religion and morality; and when a soul turns definitely from the will and way of God to the paths of disobedience, then that mystic power which our forefathers called unction, and which the Bible calls the Spirit of God, seems to be dissipated, and to pass away as the aroma when scent has been long exposed to common air. So Saul lost the special enduement of power which had enabled him to subdue his enemies and to order his kingdom. He was left henceforth to the dictates of his own mind and spirit for the government of his realm; and from that day forward his reign was stained with many a blot.

2. Whether it was the quarrel with Samuel or the constant wars with the Philistines or other reasons which we know not of, a deep spirit of gloom and melancholy settled upon Saul. As the oldest Hebrew writers refer all things, whether good or bad, to the direct, if inexplicable, agency and will of God, they called Saul's melancholy an evil spirit from God. Saul's temperament and character being what they were, we can easily understand what the result would be. He was evidently a man of warm, though undisciplined, affection; he had the emotional temperament of a true Oriental, easily swayed by the breath of impulse, and we cannot doubt that troubles arising from the new Philistine war, and bickerings among the tribes, would excite almost to frenzy one of such moods. He was between two great forces—the Spirit of the Lord which was leaving him, and the evil spirit which was acquiring the mastery. The victim of a morbid melancholy, the unhappy king, as the Lord's rejected, gave way to his worst propensities.

Not, indeed, that Saul's life was henceforth wholly bad. There are few more difficult questions, in the case of minds utterly distempered and disordered as his was, than to determine where sin, or moral disease, has ended, and madness, or mental disease, has begun. There is an obscure and mysterious border-land, where these two seem inextricably mingled, acting and reacting the one upon the other. Continually we find him catching glimpses of better things and, on at least one occasion, taking his old place and prophesying among the prophets. But he is unstable and inconstant, yielding himself to the vagaries and passions of an unbalanced heart and will, until at length a frenzy, which seems to have been little short of actual madness, takes possession of him.

¶ For nearly five years, while Bishop of Truro, Dr. Wilkinson suffered the miseries and terrors of melancholia. His mind never lost its balance, but he suffered a daily martyrdom. He could get no rest; the prospect of work and daily engagements became unbearable; the smallest decisions became occasions of mental torture. He struggled on manfully, trying to relieve his wretchedness by travel, and took long holidays from work. Sometimes the cloud lifted a little, but invariably closed in again. His self-control and patience were wonderful. Probably only two persons —his daughter and Canon Scott Holland, with whom he travelled —knew at the time what he had to bear. He never lost his courtesy and consideration for others; he was never betrayed into irritability or sharpness; indeed, though it often seemed impossible that he could fulfil an engagement, when he was once launched he generally spoke with the old force and lucidity. But, what was the worst trial of all, his joyful sense of the Divine Presence for long periods deserted him. He never doubted that the love and peace were there, but he was as a man imprisoned in a dungeon, hearing the breeze and the rustle of leaves against the bars.[1]

II.

David.

1. This melancholy of Saul had large and important consequences. Because of it Saul made the acquaintance of the warrior hero David, who was destined to succeed him on the throne.

[1] A. C. Benson, *The Leaves of the Tree*, 121.

Of David and of his early fortunes and of his first meeting with Saul there are two different accounts in the Bible. One is older and more historical, the other later and less historical. According to the older account, the servants of Saul, who little understood the deeper causes of their master's madness, sent for David to sooth him with his harp, and Saul "loved him greatly." They sit side by side, the likenesses of the old system passing away and of the new system coming into existence. Saul, the warlike chief, his great spear always by his side, reluctant, moody, melancholy, and David, the youthful minstrel, his harp in his hand, fresh from the schools, where the spirit of the better times was fostered, pouring forth to soothe the troubled spirit of the king the earliest of those strains which have soothed the troubled spirit of the whole world.

¶ This passage of Scripture has been expounded by Robert Browning in one of the greatest poems of the nineteenth century. It is, in itself, a moving incident, the great first king, drear and stark in his tent, and the bright, blythe young harpist seeking by music to win his soul back from the inferno of despair where it was overwhelmed. But how? By what fashion of music can this miracle be accomplished? What craft can avail to bring back the dead to life? First, says Browning, he plays the tune of the sheepfold, the musical call to which the sheep flock across the hills in the evening when the stars are coming out. Then he plays strains which the creatures loved, the quails and the crickets and the jerboa. And then the reaper's song of rejoicing, and then:

> The last song,
> When the dead man is praised on his journey.

And then he breaks into a glad marriage chant, and follows this with a battle march, and this again with:

> The chorus intoned,
> As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.

This last effort, according to Browning, wrung a deep groan from the lips of the afflicted and desolate Saul. There was power in the music to break the chain of Saul's captivity. But Browning is absolutely right in representing that for the higher and deeper influence music alone, mere instrumental music, will not suffice. David realizes this; he begins to sing to his harp, he makes the music the vehicle of great and inspiring thought, and he sings

these uplifting and invigorating beliefs and hopes into the sorrow-stricken soul before him. When all the arguments of his counsellors had failed to move him, and all the seductions and solicitations of those who loved him, this penetrating strain of David's harp, and this chanted admonition it may be of David's fresh young voice, wrought the miracle, broke the spell, brought light to the dark soul, and set the spirit free.[1]

2. The later account of the meeting of Saul and David is the familiar story of the giant Goliath. Both accounts represent David as becoming after a time the successful general of Saul in campaigns against the Philistines.

Gradually Saul's jealousy of David's success and popularity became aroused. As Saul passed through the cities from his victory over his enemies, the women of Israel came out to meet him, singing and dancing; and they said, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Immediately the jealous king "was very wroth, and the saying displeased him"; his sullenness returned; he feared David as a rival; and "eyed him from that day and forward." Poor Saul had to drink the bitter cup which all who love the sweet draught of popular applause have sooner or later to taste; and we need not think him a monster of badness because he found it bitter.

¶ In one pathetic passage of his autobiographical memoranda, there is mention—though I suppress the name—of a neighbouring pastor at Notting Hill, specially gifted and qualified as an expositor of the Scriptures. His ministry was attracting some members of my father's congregation. He missed them frequently from their seats in the Tabernacle. "Henry Varley did not like this," he writes. To his intense self-loathing, he found that the "green-eyed monster" of jealousy had its claws upon his soul. "I shall never forget," he continues, "the sense of guilt and sin that possessed me over that business. . . . I was miserable. . . . Was I practically saying to the Lord Jesus, 'Unless the prosperity of Thy Church and people comes in this neighbourhood by me, success had better not come'? Was I really showing inability to rejoice in another worker's service? I felt that it was a sin of a very hateful character. I never asked the Lord to take away my life either before or since; but I did then, unless His grace gave me victory over this foul image of jealousy." The suggestion inevitably arises of the possibility of vacant pulpits if

[1] C. S. Horne, *All Things are Yours*, 81.

preachers jealous of other preachers' success were to pray to die, and their prayer were answered.[1]

3. One development after another occurred to excite Saul's jealousy afresh. At last the turbulent ferment of passion broke forth into wild frenzy. Saul had no longer any doubt: the armour-bearer whom he had promoted to be leader of his forces is not satisfied with casting into the shade the king's name and martial glory; his aim is higher; he wishes to become the friend of the king's son, the king's son-in-law — the traitor wishes to become the king's successor before his death. Henceforth Saul's decision is immovable: the traitor is doomed to death. Saul sought to carry out his decision, however and whenever he could. The victim of his suspicion having escaped his murderous steel, he went forth expressly to seek him. With the tenacity peculiar to one haunted by an illusion, he devoted himself henceforth almost exclusively to his purpose of avenging himself on his supposed mortal enemy and persecutor. We may confidently assert that this thought, which never again left the unfortunate man, finally wasted him away. Stormy and dark as Saul's nature had become, and grave as had been his failure to be worthy of the monarchy, one cannot but feel the infinite pathos and pity of his life.

Saul was now mad with suspicion and jealousy and hatred. He lived, so to speak, in continual murder, for he lived in hatred of David, and hunted after him to take away his life. He had indulged in hateful passions until they had completely mastered him, and were plunging him headlong into ruin. And yet, in the midst of that terrible darkness and madness and moral derangement, there were momentary flashes of returning consciousness, brief sunny beams of light, which showed that, beneath all these strange and awful distortions of his mind, there was a nobler and truer self not utterly dead. Like a dismantled and helpless wreck over which wild and pitiless storms rage, Saul showed, even in his ruin, what he might and ought to have been.

¶ Suspicion is a monster 'tis vain to contend with; it can swallow everything or it can live upon nothing; its patience is as inexhaustible as its ingenuity is wonderful, and it builds castles out of rubbish, and as often as they fall for want of a foundation

[1] *Henry Varley's Life Story*, by his Son, 235.

it collects fresh materials and begins anew. The provoking thing is, it's always to be seen but never to be caught, so that there's no hopes of ever being able to overcome it.[1]

4. Saul dismissed David from his court and threw him into dangers; but David's disgrace and danger increased his popularity. Saul made the marriage with his daughter a trap for David, and commanded his son to kill him; but his design ended in Michal's passionate love, and in Jonathan's faithful friendship. He pursued him over the hills of Judah, and he found that he had unconsciously been in his enemy's power and had been spared by his enemy's generosity; and with that ebb and flow of sentiment so natural, so true, so difficult to square with any precise theories of predestination or reprobation, yet so important as indications of a living human character—the old fatherly feeling towards David revived. "Is this thy voice, my son David?" And he lifted up his voice and wept. "I have sinned: return, my son David: . . . behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. . . . Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place." Thus they parted on the hills of Judah.

It is possible that this was the last interview between the two men, and how pleasant it is when the last meeting is the happiest! Would not Saul carry back from Engedi a heart not only wiser but gladder, because of the ineradicable assurance that David cared for him, and had done him nothing but good? The gentleness of the hunted man called out this stray gleam of a loftier spirit, and brought him back, yet once again, to the border of repentance.

He spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power—
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.
Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized mine—
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?

[1] J. A. Doyle, *Memoir of Susan Ferrier*, 60.

I yearned—"Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
As this moment,—had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense!"[1]

III.

Endor and Gilboa.

1. The Philistines now took advantage of the divided state of Israel to make a united effort to recover their former prestige and power. Summoning all their forces from the various cities, they moved northward in different companies toward Esdraelon and the valley of Jezreel. On the opposite side, on the rise of Mount Gilboa, was the Israelite army, keeping as usual to the heights which were its security.

A point which may well be emphasized at this stage is this: The latter half of the First Book of Samuel has clearly been written with keen enthusiasm for the young captain who was in due course to be the founder of a new dynasty. Consequently, Saul appears only incidentally, and so we may be in some danger of failing to realize how great a work Saul had done. He must have knit together his kingdom during the years when David attracts all our attention. Though he fails to seize David, he is able to hunt him from place to place. In spite of the evident popularity which David enjoys, and in spite of his skill as a captain, there is no sign of any success gained by him against the forces of Saul.

We know not what may have been the feeling of the army at this juncture. But we are told that "when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly." "The Spirit of the Lord," which had roused him in his former years, had now departed from him. There was now no harp of the shepherd Psalmist to drive away the evil spirit; and "when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not"; no vision was vouchsafed to him in trance or dream, as before when he lay under the prophetic influence all night at Ramah; no

[1] Browning, *Saul*.

intimation of the Divine will by the Urim and Thummim of the high priest's breastplate, for the house of Ithamar had been exterminated by the sword of Doeg, and its sole survivor, Abiathar, was following the fortunes of his fugitive rival; no consoling voice of the prophets of God, for Samuel, his ancient counsellor, had long since parted from him and had descended in mourning to his grave. Saul's courage is gone. He cannot hope, because he cannot pray. He feels that God has departed from him. Where clear eyes would have seen signs of promise, he discerns only signals of despair.

In this extremity the desperate man turned to a forbidden quarter. While he was still friendly with Samuel, we are told that, at Samuel's suggestion, he had forbidden all sorcery and witchcraft and all attempted foretelling of the future by magic spells and incantations and familiar spirits and invocations of the dead. Now Saul, in his desperation and his melancholy, turned in the hour of gloom and disaster to the very practices he had himself forbidden. At Endor lived a woman who claimed that she could raise the dead. To this woman Saul resolved to direct those prayers which he dared not address to God. He was torn with anxiety at the prospect of a battle on which everything hinged; he was in the blackness of gloom at the thought that God had hidden His face from him; he was faint from want of food: "he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night," and in that weakened condition had had a long and probably dangerous journey over difficult ground. And so the wretched witch and the more wretched king stand face to face.

Even in this last act recorded of Saul on the night before his death there is a strange and mad confusion between a real desire to know the mind of God and a feeling that to him it could be declared only through some evil agent. He had a longing to see the friend of his youth, the true counsellor from whom he had severed himself, and when the witch produced some semblance of the departed prophet, his imagination quickly invested it with reality. He felt that the presence of the reprover and friend was there. "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" The question may have been the ventriloquism of a charlatan bribed by the Philistines to practise upon Saul's superstition, and meant to check further inquiry. It may have been some sign from the

unseen world. We do not know, and it does not matter. Saul believed that Samuel spoke, and the misery of it is, he believed that Samuel could love him when God had ceased to care for him; he believed there could be rain upon the grass when there was no water in the sea. Therefore his reply: "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

But from the lips of the prophet came no words of comfort or hope. Saul was reminded of the past, reminded that only those things had come upon him which he had been assured would come if he went the way he had gone. He was reminded of Moses and the prophets, and warned to hear them, and told that he had but a night to listen. No gleam of hope from any outward change was given him. "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." "Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel."

After this single outburst of despair the monarch resumed the majesty of silence. He wrapped his curse about him and went forth into the night.

¶ While in the Biblical account the woman remains anonymous, the rabbinical Midrash maintains that the witch of Endor was Zephaniah, the mother of Abner. That a supernatural appearance is here described is inferred from the repeated emphasis laid on the statement that Samuel had died and had been buried (1 Sam. xxv. 1, xxviii. 3), by which the assumption that Samuel was still living when summoned, is discredited. Still he was invoked during the first twelve months after his death, when, according to the Rabbis, the spirit still hovers near the body. In connexion with the incidents of the story, the Rabbis have developed the theory that the necromancer sees the spirit but is unable to hear his speech, while the person at whose instance the spirit is called hears the voice but fails to see; bystanders neither hear nor see. The outcry of the woman at the sight of Samuel was due to his rising in an unusual way—upright, not, as she expected, in a horizontal position.

The story throws light on the prevailing beliefs of primitive Israel concerning the possibility of summoning the dead and consulting them. Discussions concerning the historical veracity of this report, and attempts to reconcile its contents with natural

laws by assuming that the woman palmed off some fraud on the excited king exhausted by previous fasting, miss the point of the Biblical account. The scene is really a satire on King Saul, and the summoning of the dead is introduced only incidentally. He, the destroyer of the necromancers, forsaken by Jahweh, himself repairs to a witch's house, but has only his pains for his trouble. Samuel refuses to help, and reiterates what Saul's fears had anticipated.[1]

2. On the morrow there was some slight alteration in the disposition of the respective hosts. The Philistines moved towards Aphek, a little to the west of their camp; while the Israelites descended from the heights of Gilboa, and took up a position near the spring or fountain of Jezreel. Presently the battle was joined. Of the course of that battle we know no details. It ended in a complete and disastrous rout of the Israelites, on whom, destitute or nearly so of such aids, the cavalry and chariots must have inflicted terrible losses. Apparently, in spite of the Israelite advantage of ground, they were forced up the hill with great slaughter. Doubtless a body of devoted adherents fought desperately around Saul, as at Flodden, when the tide of battle was going sorely against Scotland,

> Still the Scots around their king,
> Unbroken, fought in desperate ring.

That Saul himself would fight as he never fought before we can well believe. Yet he has the pang of seeing his three sons, including his well-loved Jonathan, die at his side. Then the archers get his range, and he is sore wounded. Hope is gone even of inflicting more loss on the enemy before his own death. He can but die. The two accounts given of his death seem at first sight slightly contradictory. According to 1 Sam. xxxi. 4, Saul, in the extremity of his despair, fell upon his sword and died; yet, according to 2 Sam. i. 10, he was slain at his own request by a wandering Amalekite. Probably Saul really died by his own hand, and the Amalekite, prowling on the field in search of plunder, found the dead body where it had fallen, and thought that his alleged slaughter of Saul would bring him a liberal reward from one who had been so long hunted down by the unfortunate king.

[1] E. G. Hirsch, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, v. 158.

¶ The Philistines had entered Esdraelon — doubtless by Megiddo. Had their aim been the invasion of the hill-country, they would have turned south-east to Jenin, and Saul would have met them there. That, instead, we find them striking north-east to Shunem, at the head of the Vale of Jezreel, proves that at least their first intention had to do with the Valley of the Jordan. Either they had come to subjugate all the low country, and so confine Israel, as the Canaanites did, to the hills, or else they sought to secure their caravan route to Damascus and the East, from Israel's descents upon it by the roads from Bezek to Bethshan and across Gilboa. In either case Saul must not be permitted to remain where he was, for from Gilboa he could descend with equal ease upon Esdraelon and the Valley of the Jordan. They attacked him, therefore, on his superior position. Both the narrative of the battle and the great Elegy in which the defeat was mourned imply that the fighting was upon the heights of Gilboa, and yet upon ground over which cavalry and chariots might operate. The Philistines could not carry Saul's position directly from Shunem, for that way the plain dips, and the deep bed of the stream intervenes and the rocks of Gilboa are steep and high. But they went round Jezreel, and attacked the promontory of the hill by the easier slopes and wadies to the south, which lead up to open ground about the village of Nuris, and directly above the 'Ain Jalûd. Somewhere on these slopes they must have encountered that desperate resistance which cost Israel the life of three of the king's sons; and somewhere higher up the gigantic king himself, wounded and pressed hard by the chariots and horsemen, yet imperious to the last, commanded his own death.[1]

3. With the fall of Saul, Israel lost a hero who had begun his career with brilliance and great promise. He seemed to be called to do great things. A very talented nature, richly gifted, quick to decide, firm of hand, bold to venture, valiant in battle, animated with zeal for the greatness of Israel, and devoutly attached to Jehovah, he stopped suddenly short in his course, paralysed by a mysterious power. He suddenly showed himself unequal to the task that his nation and his crown imposed upon him, without our being able to say wherein exactly his weakness or his fault lay. But it is hardly to be doubted that the secret of his failure was, as in the case of Esau, his *irreligion.*

His character, indeed, is obscure, and we must be cautious while considering it; still, as Scripture is given us for our instruc-

[1] G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 402.

tion, it is surely right to make the most of what we find there, and to form our judgment by such lights as we possess. It would appear, then, that Saul was never under the abiding influence of religion, or, in Scripture language, "the fear of God," however he might be at times moved and softened. Some men are inconsistent in their conduct, as Samson, or as Eli, in a different way, and yet may have lived by faith, though a weak faith. Others have sudden falls, as David had. Others are corrupted by prosperity, as Solomon. But as to Saul, there is no proof that he had any deep-seated religious principle at all; rather, it is to be feared, his history is a lesson to us, that the "heart of unbelief" may exist in the very sight of God, may rule a man in spite of many natural advantages of character, in the midst of much that is virtuous, amiable, and commendable. For years the thought of God had meant less and less to Saul, and accordingly Saul had been more and more left to himself. And his end illustrates the stern words of Prov. i. 25–27:

> "Ye have set at nought all my counsel,
> And would none of my reproof:
> I also will laugh at your calamity;
> I will mock when your fear cometh;
> When your fear cometh as desolation,
> And your destruction cometh as a whirlwind."

4. The affection which Saul in his better days had inspired came out touchingly even after he was dead. The great Benjamite's body and the bodies of his sons, which the Philistines dishonoured, were bravely rescued in a foray by their kinsmen from across the Jordan, the men of Jabesh-gilead. Their bones were reverently and sadly buried beneath a tree in Jabesh, from which King David ultimately brought them for burial in the ancestral sepulchre of Kish in the country of Benjamin in Zelah. Another tribute of affection to the Saul of earlier days was given in the beautiful lament of David, when the news reached him of Saul's and Jonathan's death. In that exquisite epitaph is no revenge or bitterness, no reprobation or dispraise. It calls up an earlier, brighter recollection of the conqueror beloved by his people, the delight of the daughters of Israel, of the heroism of father and of son, their lives, their undivided deaths. Let us

think of him so; think of him as Handel must have felt when he penned for him the most moving funeral requiem the world has known. The auspicious and the hapless life alike put human judgment to the hush.

Ah! even yet I dream there lingers still
Through wildest storms, and wanderings of the will,
The man that God will own;
That loftiest hour thou canst not all forget,
That glory of the past is with thee yet,
That music from the Throne.

Yes, he shall own it in whose minstrel notes
A higher strain than priest's or prophet's floats,
The Spirit from on high;
His voice shall sing of father and of son,
Who still unsevered, soul and heart still one,
In death's dark chamber lie.

Lovely and pleasant yet our names shall be;
The guilt, the shame, the woe, the pain, shall flee;
And as the shadows fall,
Amid the surging storm, and battle's roar,
We with calm steps approach the eternal shore
Where peace reigns over all.[1]

[1] E. H. Plumptre, *Master and Scholar.*

JONATHAN.

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JONATHAN.

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.—2 Sam. i. 26.

SAUL and his age were animated by a spirit whose home was earth, not heaven; yet they form the environment of one of the finest souls that have ever breathed—the man Jonathan. The story of his life, hastily viewed, seems almost incidental, but scholarly examination of it shows that its light and gladness are in marked contrast to the darkness and sorrow in the careers of Saul and David. The narratives in which he figures successively celebrate his martial exploits and his romantic friendship with David, and they portray a character which combines in a unique degree the heroism of the Hebrew patriot with the spirit of Christian virtue. He appears as a fine, generous, brave and chivalrous spirit, upright in his bearing towards all, gentle and beautiful in character. Such a prince would seem to have been born for a brilliant career, but the melancholy fortunes of the house of Saul involved him also in their ruin. There is an indefinable and inspiring charm in his attitude towards David, the story of which has done much to suggest and arouse the unselfish devotion of man to man.

Jonathan was a true knight of God, who anticipated some of the noblest traits of Christian chivalry. He lived pure, spoke true, righted wrong, was faithful to the high claims of human love, and followed the Christ, though as yet he knew Him not. He is the most chivalrous figure in the Old Testament, the flower and crown of Hebrew history, the knight without reproach. So far as we are informed, there was not a single crooked line or dark spot in his conduct. From first to last his life reads like some old romance, like one of Tennyson's sweetest idylls; and so

long as beautiful souls are fairer in our eyes than wealth and honour, and the heroism which dies unrewarded more pathetic and not less lovely than that which wins earthly triumph, so long will the soul thrill with emotion, and the pulse beat faster, when such stories as his are told.

I.

The Warrior Prince.

Jonathan . . . who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel.—1 Sam. xiv. 45.

1. Handsome and high-mettled, full of nerve and full of heart, Jonathan was the pride of the army and the darling of the common people. We think of him so frequently in connexion with his rare and beautiful friendship with David that we do not give the full emphasis which is deserved to the strength and courage which were also his. As warrior prince Jonathan takes rank among the bravest captains of Israel's iron age. Like Saul, he was fleet of foot, and of great physical strength, and, as became a Benjamite, a noted archer. In the familiar speech of the people, he may have been known, for his grace and agility, as the gazelle (so Ewald, rendering v. 19, "the gazelle is slain"). He comes upon the scene as the hero of a campaign against the Philistines, in which the bearing of Saul is little more than a foil to the bold initiative, the rapid movement, and the practical sense of his son. The Philistines, it would seem, had been in effective occupation of the Israelitish territory, and the force collected by Saul had not yet made any considerable impression, when a blow struck by Jonathan, to whom Saul had entrusted a third of his following, loudly sounded the note of rebellion.

¶ The exact nature of Jonathan's deed at Geba is difficult to ascertain. The uncertainty arises from the ambiguity of נְצִיב, an ambiguity which may be reproduced in English by saying that he destroyed a post, *i.e.*, either a garrison, or a pillar erected in token of the Philistine supremacy (Gen. xix. 26), or an official of some kind. The last interpretation is supported by 1 Kings iv. 19.[1]

[1] W. P. Paterson, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 753.

2. The Philistines retaliated by pouring into the almost defenceless country a huge host, including both cavalry and chariots, which occupied Michmash, and proceeded to lay waste the country in three directions—north, west, and south. The unarmed country people were terrorized, and either hid themselves "in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places," or else fled across Jordan to the high lands of Gilead. When Saul joined forces with Jonathan at Geba, his three thousand men had shrunk to six hundred.

The two armies came face to face at the passage of Michmash, and took up their positions on opposite sides of a deep ravine. The situation was an extremely critical one for Saul and the six hundred men who "followed trembling" after their leader. It required some heroism even to face the Philistine hosts with such a paltry and timorous band. Jonathan relieved the situation by a daring single-handed exploit which was remarkably successful, and turned the scales against the invaders. Accompanied by his armour-bearer, he hailed the Philistine garrison, and, having satisfied himself that their reply was a sign that the Omnipotent God was on his side (v. 12), he scaled the opposing rocky rampart and fell upon the astonished garrison. This deed was more than brave; it was audacious to the point of madness. Reason would have laughed it to scorn; military men would have called it insanity; and people who count odds would have written it down impossible. Yet it succeeded. Jonathan's faith was of the kind that clothes itself with omnipotence. "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few," he shouted. That was his battle-cry as he scaled the rugged steep, followed by his armour-bearer. And the army which had been thought so powerful, so dreadful, reeled and fell back before their strokes; and then, never suspecting that they were attacked by only two men, believing that the mist and darkness concealed a multitude of assailants, the host gave way to panic, rushing pell-mell, smiting one another down until they had all melted away in confusion and rout.

From his outlook at Gibeah, Saul beheld the wild confusion, and how the multitude swayed to and fro and melted away. Without delay he hurled himself with his soldiers on the flying foe, who fled, in headlong precipitancy, down the long valley, past

Beth-haven, past the Upper and then the Lower Beth-horon, in order to gain the Philistine frontier by the valley of Aijalon. Every town through which the fugitives passed rose in their rear, and joined the pursuit, so that the flying host was greatly reduced, and thousands of warriors dyed, with their hearts' blood, the highways of the land, which they had so grievously oppressed. Thus did God deliver His people in answer to Jonathan's faith.

¶ Very early, Mr. Gladstone gave marked evidence of that sovereign quality of Courage which became one of the most signal of all his traits. He used to say that he had known three men in his time possessing in a supreme degree the virtue of parliamentary courage—Peel, Lord John Russell, and Disraeli. To some other contemporaries for whom courage might be claimed, he stoutly denied it. Nobody ever dreamed of denying it to him, whether parliamentary courage or any other, in either its active or its passive shape, either in daring or in fortitude. He had even the courage to be prudent, just as he knew when it was prudent to be bold. He applied in public things the Spenserian line, "Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold," but neither did he forget the iron door with its admonition, "Be not too bold." The great Condé, when complimented on his courage, always said that he took good care never to call upon it unless the occasion were absolutely necessary. No more did Mr. Gladstone go out of his way to summon courage for its own sake, but only when spurred by duty; then he knew no faltering. Capable of much circumspection, yet soon he became known for a man of lion heart.[1]

3. The defeat of the Philistines would have been still more crushing had not Saul, in the excitement of victory, rashly laid a curse on the people if they should partake of food before the evening. Father and son had not met on that day; Saul only conjectured his son's absence from not finding him when he numbered the people. Jonathan was ignorant of his father's imprecation, and, putting forth the staff which (with his sling and bow) had been his only weapon, tasted the honey which overflowed from the wild hives as he dashed through the forest. The people in general were restrained by fear of the royal curse; but the moment that the day with its enforced fast was over they flew, like Mussulmans at sunset during the fast of Ramazan, upon the

[1] Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, i. 188.

captured cattle, and devoured them even to the brutal neglect of the law forbidding the eating of flesh which contained blood. This violation of the sacred usage Saul endeavoured to control by erecting a large stone which served the purpose at once of a rude altar and of a rude table. It was in the dead of night, after this wild revel was over, that he proposed that the pursuit should be continued till dawn; and then, when the silence of the oracle of the high priest indicated that something had occurred to intercept the Divine favour, the lot was tried and Jonathan appeared as the culprit. Jephthah's dreadful sacrifice would have been repeated; but the people interposed on behalf of the hero of that great day, and Jonathan was saved.

¶ Jonathan was a true man of God. He had set out that morning in his wonderful exploit in the true spirit of faith and full consecration to God. He was in far nearer fellowship with God than his father, and yet so far from approving of the religious order to fast which his father had given, he regards it with displeasure and distrust. Godly men will sometimes be found less outwardly religious than some other men and will greatly shock them by being so. The godly man has an unction from the Holy One to understand His will; he goes straight to the Lord's business; like our blessed Lord, he finishes the work given him to do, while the merely religious man is often so occupied with his forms, that, like the Pharisees, he neglects the structure for which forms are but the scaffolding; in paying his tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, he omits the weightier matters—justice, mercy, and truth.[1]

II.

The Pattern of Friendship.

The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.—1 Sam. xviii. 1.

1. If it was the military exploits of Jonathan that chiefly impressed his contemporaries, it is his friendship with David that has most strongly appealed to the imagination of the after-world. In truth, it gives an unrivalled example of the essential notes of friendship—warmth of affection, disinterestedness, helpfulness, confidence, and constancy. The love of Jonathan for David is

[1] W. G. Blaikie.

39, 73?

represented as of sudden growth, its birthday the day when they first met after the slaying of Goliath. The young shepherd lad had been brought into the king's presence amid the cheers of the army and with the modest flush of victory on his brow, and there Jonathan saw him and loved him. The jealousy of Saul and the love of Jonathan awoke almost at the same moment, "and Saul became David's enemy continually." The progress of Saul's hatred is continuous and steady from the time of the slaughter of the Philistine giant. From the same point begins Jonathan's love for the man whom his father hated. The reason of Saul's hatred is plain. He was rejected from his kingdom. He suspected that David was the man whom God had chosen to fill his place, and so was naturally jealous. If Saul's jealousy was natural under the circumstances, surely Jonathan's love was supernatural. Jonathan, by his own brave, heroic deeds, had been the idol of the people, until David's triumph over the Philistine had changed the current of their fickle affection. The acclamations which welcomed the shepherd lad were so much stolen from the popularity of the king's son. Jonathan was forgotten in the popular furore which raised David to sudden fame. From the day that the son of Jesse appeared, the cloud began to gather over Jonathan's prospects. The house of Saul felt instinctively that the kingdom was slipping from their grasp into the hands of this young competitor. Judging by the way of the world, they owed him nothing but distrust and hatred. We miss the point in Jonathan's character if we fail to see that it was not his interest, not the interest of his house, that he should befriend David.

¶ Mystical, more than magical, is that Communing of Soul with Soul, both looking heavenward: here properly Soul first speaks with Soul; for only in looking heavenward, take it in what sense you may, not in looking earthward, does what we can call Union, mutual Love, Society, begin to be possible. How true is that of Novalis: "It is certain, my Belief gains quite *infinitely* the moment I can convince another mind thereof"! Gaze thou in the face of thy Brother, in those eyes where plays the lambent fire of Kindness, or in those where rages the lurid conflagration of Anger; feel how thy own so quiet Soul is straightway involuntarily kindled with the like, and ye blaze and reverberate on each other, till it is all one limitless confluent flame (of embracing Love, or of deadly-grappling Hate); and then say what miraculous

virtue goes out of man into man. But if so, through all the thick-plied hulls of our Earthly Life; how much more when it is of the Divine Life we speak, and inmost ME is, as it were, brought into contact with inmost ME![1]

2. Very charming are the words which describe the bond of friendship which Jonathan and David made. "Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle."

Is it lawful to allegorize these simple and interesting details?

(1) They may be used to suggest that Christ, the Prince of Heaven, comes seeking a compact with us. It astonishes us to see Jonathan seeking a compact with David the shepherd boy; but how much more wonderful when Jesus, the Son of God, rich in all the glory of heaven, comes down to earth and suffers hardship and poverty and bitterest temptation and trial, and finally dies on the cross for us, that He may be able to make a compact between Himself and poor sinners. Surely nothing but love could prompt it. Only love could have made Jonathan do such a wonderful thing as he did to David, and only love, indescribable, deathless love, could have brought Jesus down from heaven to die for us.

(2) There is another suggestion. Did Jonathan's love prompt him to give his own clothes to David, so that his humble friend might look as much the prince as himself? Christ comes offering to clothe us in His own beautiful garments of purity and righteousness. It is the glory of Christians that Christ helps them to become like Himself. Christ does not propose to save us in our sins, but to save us from our sins. Our ragged clothing of sin and evil habit is to be cast off, and we are to be clothed with goodness and gentleness and meekness and love and hope. That is the most glorious thing about Christianity. It is not that a man may simply be saved from sorrow and despair and punishment on account of his sins, but that the sinner's nature may be transformed and that he may become a prince of God's realm, a holy man. The drunkard may put on sobriety, the gambler may put on honour and integrity, the impure may become wholesome and

[1] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, Bk. iii., chap. ii.

noble, the low and the vulgar may be lifted up to have high ideals and brave and splendid purposes.

(3) There is yet another suggestion here. Jonathan not only bestowed upon David his own clothing, but he gave him his own armour and weapons. So Christ equips us with the very weapons with which He battled in this world when He was tempted in all points like as we are and yet came off victorious, without sin. St. Paul declares that our Lord gives us the whole armour of God, and that, thus arrayed, we are able to withstand all the wiles of the devil. He gives us the girdle of truth, and the breastplate of righteousness; on our feet He puts shoes made of the preparation of the gospel of peace; on the left arm we carry the shield of faith—a wonderful shield that is able to stop every fiery dart of the wicked one. On our brow He sets the helmet of salvation, and in the right hand He puts a sword far more splendid than that which David captured from Goliath—the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¶ That friendship of Prince Jonathan for David was human; this of Jesus for us is Divine. That had a beginning; this is from everlasting. That was deserved; this is wholly undeserved. That was highly valued by its object; this is but poorly and inadequately appreciated at the best. That was self-sacrificing to the extent of risking life; this was so to the extent of enduring "death, even the cursed death of the cross," and all with a view to converting enemies into friends.[1]

3. David was in all probability profoundly influenced by the character of Jonathan, who must have been considerably older than himself. Years have passed since the day of Michmash and Aijalon—years which only served to deepen and strengthen Jonathan's noble character. He was, if possible, more than ever the man of piety, of patriotism, and of high ideals. And the bond of a common manliness knit these twin souls from the first. But the love of Jonathan for David rests upon a totally different level from that occupied by the love of David for Jonathan. David's love for Jonathan had no barriers; it coincided with his interest. But the love of Jonathan for David had every prudential argument against it. He puts out his hand to save from the destroying hand of his father a man whom the

[1] J. Mackay, *Jonathan, the Friend of David*, 76.

popular voice had predicted to be his own supplanter. In this he is animated by a purely personal liking. He is an absolute spendthrift for the sake of love. Nothing could more powerfully express the attitude of his mind than the passage in 1 Sam. xviii. 4, when he makes a covenant with David: "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle." It is a typical statement; it describes in one sentence the whole trend of his heart. From beginning to end, the love of Jonathan for David was a disrobing, a divestiture. In every act of friendship, in every deed of devotion, in every outstretching of a protective hand, he was stripping himself of a royal garment. He was unarming himself, ungirding himself, sapping the foundations of his imperial strength—and all to gratify an impulse of human affection. He saw in the young hero a congenial soul and a true man. He was attracted by his piety, his patriotism, and his prowess, and he yielded up his heart to him in the unselfish impulse of disinterested affection. He did not seem to care that the duel with the giant would, in the after history of the nation, be seen to rival his own brilliant achievement at Geba. He did not think of himself at all; but, having found a man whom he could love and trust, he "grappled him to his soul with hooks of steel." Even when he came to know that David was the predestined occupant of his father's throne, the heart of Jonathan was never alienated from him. He accepted the lot which was before him, and rejoiced in it for David's sake, saying only, "Thou shalt be king in Israel, and I shall be next unto thee."

¶ Every friendship is unique; and no individual can hope to be a satisfying friend to every one, or even to a very large number of persons. Now and then, however, a soul enters this life with rare gifts for friendship,—with a genius for it. Such an one was Hannah Pipe. The secrets of her power as a Friend seem to me three. She had much to give; she gave generously; she could be absolutely trusted. And as years went on, her power for friendship grew, because she took trouble and care to have ever more and more to give, and to expand her power of loving. In loving as in other things, practice makes perfect. . . . "Friendship's privileges are also *duties*"; she wrote in a letter from Veldes to Lady Huggins,—"because they are privileges, I have throughout my whole life failed to see that they are duties.

I have never given myself to my friends. I have *denied myself* to them, and I thought it right because I *denied myself*. The self-denial blinded me to the denial. You have taught me better, and have thereby widened, enriched, and probably lengthened my life beyond your own thought."[1]

4. We are deeply impressed with the fidelity with which, on Jonathan's part, this friendship was maintained even in the face of personal dangers. When Saul's heart was stirred against David, and was filled with murderous intent regarding him, Jonathan was placed in a very difficult and perplexing position. He was called to decide between his father and David, and he was true to his friend, without being unfilial to Saul. His fidelity was soon called into action by the insane rage of his father against David. He interceded for his life, at first with success. Then the madness returned, and David fled. It was in a secret interview during this flight, by the stone of Ezel, that a second covenant was made between the two friends, of a still more binding kind than the first, extending to their mutual posterity—Jonathan laying such emphasis on this portion of the compact as almost to suggest the belief of a slight misgiving on his part of David's future conduct in this respect. It is this interview that brings out the character of Jonathan in the liveliest colours—his little artifices, his love for both his father and his friend, his bitter disappointment at his father's unmanageable fury, his familiar sport of archery. With passionate embraces and tears the two friends parted to meet only once more; that one more meeting was far away in the forest of Ziph, during Saul's pursuit of David. Jonathan's alarm for his friend's life is now changed into a confidence that he will escape: "He strengthened his hand in God." Finally, and for the third time, they renewed the covenant, and then parted for ever (1 Sam. xxiii. 16–18). And David, though an exile and poor, had the happier lot of the two. The weary years of Jonathan were years of wild and painful tragedy. His father had frequent spasms of insanity; gusts of madness swept over him, and he was a madman with a king's unlimited power, breaking out frequently in fits of ungovernable ferocity, flinging his deadly weapons at those who happened to be nearest, raging against all who disputed his word. Surely if ever

[1] A. M. Stoddart, *Life and Letters of Hannah E. Pipe*, 424.

there was a case in which a son's disobedience would have been pardonable, it was this. None can tell what Jonathan had to endure through those sad, dark years. Yet he held on to his father to the last. Not a breath of disaffection stains the fair page of his story. There are few examples in history like it, though there are many examples of a son's loyalty to a worthy father.

¶ To his father's person and memory, Mr. Gladstone's fervid and affectionate devotion remained unbroken. "One morning," writes a female relative of his, "when I was breakfasting alone with Mr. Gladstone at Carlton House Terrace, something led to his speaking of his father. I seem to see him now, rising from his chair, standing in front of the chimney-piece, and in strains of fervid eloquence dwelling on the grandeur, the breadth and depth of his character, his generosity, his nobleness, last and greatest of all—his loving nature. His eyes filled with tears as he exclaimed: 'None but his children can know what torrents of tenderness flowed from his heart.'"[1]

¶ Let me not mourn that my Father's Force is all spent, that his Valour wars no longer. Has it not gained the victory? Let me imitate him rather; let his courageous heart beat anew in me, that when oppression and opposition unjustly threaten, I too may rise with his spirit to front them and subdue them. On the whole, ought I not to rejoice that God was pleased to give me such a Father; that from earliest years, I had the example of a real Man (of God's own making) continually before me? Let me learn of *him*; let me "write my Books as he built his Houses, and walk as blamelessly through this shadow-world"—(if God so will), to rejoin him at last. Amen!—Even among these, such a sight is growing daily rarer. My father, in several respects, has not, that I can think of, left his fellow. *Ultimus Romanorum!* Perhaps among Scottish Peasants what Samuel Johnson was among English Authors. I have a sacred pride in my Peasant Father, and would not exchange him even now for any King known to me. Gold, and the guinea-stamp; the Man, and the Clothes of the Man! Let me thank God for that greatest of blessings, and strive to live worthily of it.[2]

5. Both in the purity of his friendship and in the strength of his faith and submission Jonathan stands here above David, and is far surer than the latter himself is of his high destiny and

[1] Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, i. 19.

[2] *Reminiscences of Thomas Carlyle*, i. 10.

final triumph. It was hard for him to believe in the victory which was to displace his own house, harder still to rejoice in it, without one trace of bitterness mingling in the sweetness of his love, hardest of all actively to help it and to take sides against his father; but all these difficulties his unselfish heart overcame, and he stands for all time as the noblest example of human friendship, and as not unworthy to remind us, as from afar off and dimly, of the perfect love of the First-born Son of the true King, who has loved us all with a deeper, more patient, more self-sacrificing love.

¶ Other literary work which occupied Miss Nightingale a good deal at this time (1870) was undertaken either to help Mr. Jowett or in accordance with his advice. In July she writes to him:—"I think that Faraday's idea of friendship is very high; 'One who will serve his companion next to his God.' And when one thinks that most, nay almost all people have no idea of friendship at all except pleasant juxtaposition, it strikes one with admiration. Yet is Faraday's idea not mine. My idea of a friend is one who will and can join you in work, the sole purpose of which is to serve God. Two in one, and one in God. It almost exactly answers Jesus Christ's words. And so extraordinarily blessed have I been that I have had three such friends. I can truly say that, during the 5 years that I worked with Sidney Herbert every day and nearly all day, from the moment he came into the room no other idea came in but that of doing the work with the best of our powers in the service of God. (And this tho' he was a man of the most varied and brilliant conversational genius I have ever known—far beyond Macaulay, whom I also knew.) This is Heaven; and this is what makes me say 'I have had my heaven.'"[1]

¶ Let any one who has drunk deeply of this well-spring of happiness [friendship] look back and ask what has been the sweetest ingredient in it: let him recall the friend of his heart, whose image is associated with the choicest hours of his experience; and then let him say what is the secret and the soul of his satisfaction. If your friendship has been of a high order, the soul of it is simply the worth of him you are allowed to call your friend. He is genuine to the core; you know him through and through, and nowhere is there any twist or doubleness or guile. It may be a false and disappointing world, but you have known at least one heart that has never deceived you; and, amidst much that may have happened to lower your estimate of mankind, the image of your friend has enabled you always to believe in human

[1] Sir Edward Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, ii. 222.

nature. Surely this is the incomparable gain of friendship—fellowship with a simple pure and lofty soul. . . . In real friendship there is always the knitting of soul to soul, the exchange of heart for heart. In the classical instance of friendship in the Old Testament, its inception is exquisitely described: "And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." A union like this is formed not to be broken, and, if it is broken, it can only be with the tearing of the flesh and the loss of much blood.[1]

III.

The Crowning Close.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.—2 Sam. i. 23.

1. The closing scene in Jonathan's career came, a few years later, on the heights of Mount Gilboa, in battle against the Philistines. Jonathan dies fighting for his country, fighting for his kingdom. The decree had been issued by the mouth of Samuel that they who went forth that day to battle should not return. Jonathan and Saul were both included: "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me." And yet Jonathan did not linger or turn away. The bow of Jonathan turned not back, though the sword of Saul must return empty. He had gone forth once to conquer; he could go forth once more to die. And his death proved that what Jonathan had been willing to sacrifice was no disregarded possession, no unprized treasure, no wealth of which he was weary. It had been something for which he was ready to die; it was something for which he did die. Gilboa throws back its lurid light upon the scene of morning love and makes it doubly beautiful. It lends to that morning what the morning itself did not reveal—the vision of a great sacrifice.

2. No words can do such justice to the memory of Saul and Jonathan as the beautiful dirge composed, possibly by David

[1] J. Stalker, *Imago Christi*, 95.

himself, on the result of the battle of Gilboa. It is drawn from one of the oldest collections of national lyrics, and may be taken as expressive of David's appreciation and sorrow. David was debtor not to Jonathan alone but also to Saul, for he, too, though in very malice, had helped him to the realization of his nobler self. Between them they made him. Perhaps it was a consciousness of this fact that made him join in one noble threnody the names of Saul and Jonathan, his bitterest enemy and his dearest friend, when they lay dead together on the cold mountains of Gilboa. It seemed as though the singer had forgotten the rough experiences which had fallen to his lot through the jealous mania of the king; and, passing over recent years, he was a minstrel-shepherd once more, celebrating the glory and powers of his king.

"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!
How are the mighty fallen!
Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided."

After thus extolling Saul in lofty words, and claiming the dues of sorrow for him as a great warrior king who had enriched the nation, he goes on to express his personal feelings for Jonathan, the closing lines sounding like the last sigh over a loss too great for utterance:

"I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

DAVID.

I.

THE SHEPHERD-MINSTREL.

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The Shepherd-Minstrel.

And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly. —1 Sam. xvi. 21.

It is very rarely that a nation has associated all her attributes with the life of a single man. But in the Hebrews we find a people, through long centuries of its history and through devious changes of its fortune, consistently and persistently agreeing to heap upon a single individual the aggregate glories of every profession in life. Israel has fixed her affections upon an ideal whose very name expresses the object uniting all desires—David, the beloved. To claim one man as the object of all national desires is a claim not easily sustained. It can be supported only on the supposition that this one man has passed through every national experience, has filled every sphere, has partaken of every circumstance. Accordingly, the David of Israel is not simply the greatest of her kings; he is the man great in everything. He monopolizes all her institutions. He is her shepherd boy—the representative of her toiling classes. He is her musician —the successor of Jubal and Miriam and Deborah. He is her soldier—the conqueror of all the Goliaths that would steal her peace. He is her king—numbering her armies and regulating her polity. He is her priest—substituting a broken and contrite spirit for the blood of bulls and rams. He is her prophet—presaging with his latest breath the everlastingness of his kingdom. He is her poet—all her psalms are called by his name. The truth is, in the estimation of Israel this man is a personification of the nation itself — the embodiment of her qualities, the incarnation of her spirit, the type of her destiny.

¶ Brave and chivalrous, energetic and prudent, a judge of men, a true lover of his country, just and wisely impartial in his administration, David combined all the high qualities of a king

who has made his way to the throne by real merit, and held it successfully to the last. He had also the personal qualities that endear a king to his subjects and a man to his fellows: considerate humanity, loyalty in friendship, strong family feeling, the genial gift of music and song. The stains upon his character—his deceitfulness, his severity in war, his sensual indulgence—may be partly excused by the general customs of the time; and where he fell below the common standards of morality, he righted himself again by a genuine contrition and repentance. Add to this an upright and earnest piety, faith in God and humble submission to His will: qualities that found expression in rude, even superstitious ways typical of the age, but forming evidently the bedrock of his character. Whether we consider David's personal qualities, or his great achievements for a nation whose best traits he represented, we cannot wonder that the later generations of Israel exalted him above all his successors, and formed after his image their ideal king of the future Messianic times.[1]

I.

The Sources.

1. The Biblical account of David is to be found (*a*) in the narrative of 1 Sam. xvi.–1 Kings ii.; (*b*) in 1 Chron. ii. iii. x.–xxix.; see also Ruth iv. 18–22; and (*c*) in the titles of many psalms. Of these three sources the first is alike the oldest and the primary authority; information derived from the other two can be used only sparingly.

2. Much of the story is undoubtedly historical. It is plain that David was what we should call an honest burgher's son, and that he kept the flocks of his father on the hills about his native place. He rose to his kingship out of the level of the people, having no advantage of birth more than another. It is plain that he was of great physical beauty, strength, and courage, with an eagerness in him for fighting. It is plain that he was a born leader of men; he shows this not only as the young hero of the army, but also as the outlaw, the free-companion, the king, and the lawgiver. It is plain that he was early mixed up with the court of Saul, and that the eyes of the people were more and

[1] J. D. Fleming, *Israel's Golden Age*, 112.

more fastened upon him. It is plain that he was driven from the tents of Saul, and that he lived an outlaw's life, and collected round him a band of daring companions who lived by plunder of their foes, and by blackmail levied on their countrymen. It is plain that when he was made king he united under him the contending political parties in Israel. It is plain that he was the first who welded into one nation the different tribes and made them feel themselves a homogeneous people. It is plain that he took Jerusalem, and made it—to promote further this unity—the capital, the centre of the kingdom. It is plain that his first years as king were stormy, and that he had to fight his way against many parties to confessed overlordship. It is plain that he had to face a great rebellion arising within his own home. It is plain that he created a kind of standing army, an ordered government, an established religion, and that these important things made steadfast the national unity of Israel. It is plain that, having done these things, he not only weakened the frontier foes of Israel, but made many of them tributary. At his death Israel had taken her place. She was lifted from a mere congeries of tribes into a recognized kingdom. These matters are all historical. But we must also remember that there was certain to gather round his name and life a succession of legends. The account we have of him gives us the conception which later writers, and the people of Israel in general, had of a great king and hero. It was a national conception. It reveals to us the character the Hebrews loved and honoured. It was a religious conception. It reveals to us the sort of man they conceived to be after God's own heart; and how they thought that God dealt with him; and what they believed to be the right and the wrong ways in which a great leader should meet and master a number of various events and trials. This in itself—this conception of the Hebrews of a national and religious king of men—is an historical element and one of the greatest interest.

¶ Round the name of David have gathered the national ideals of heroism and sainthood so often found in combination in early story. They had a true origin in David, if we judge from the standards of piety and rulership that were natural to his age. Outlaw, hero, poet, saint—David is the darling of Israel's history. It would be unfair to David to picture him as the saintly author

of some of the tender Psalms that bear his name, although others of a more robust character might well be from his hand. That David was a poet seems to be certain, and the songs of lament over Saul and Abner, which have strong claims to be genuine, bear witness to his true poetic gift; but they are deficient in any display of deep religious feeling. We may have also to reduce somewhat the conception of the extent or the absoluteness of his kingly rule. He was rather one of those freebooters who, by their heroism and rough manly courage, are able to gather round them men of their own nature and to inspire in their followers a loyal devotion. To this pleasant adventurer the early kingdom fell, but for long it was only a kingdom of personal followers; nor does he ever seem to have been enthusiastically acknowledged by the whole nation, or to have established his claims absolutely beyond dispute. His heroic defence against the Philistine invasion was sufficient to give him a great place in the affection of the people, yet he never assumed the imperial rule in the manner of his successor Solomon. With all this necessary allowance for the idealizing process of a later age, David was the indispensable centre round which the early ideals and legends of the Monarchy could collect.[1]

III.

David's Introduction to History.

1. One noticeable feature of the Davidic narratives contained in 1 Sam. xvi.–xxxi. is the existence of a number of "doublets," *i.e.*, accounts of very similar events, or divergent accounts of the same event. There are three different stories introducing David into history.

(1) *The Anointing by Samuel.*—This story presents us with a dramatic contrast between the fresh hope of David's young life and the rejection of the self-willed King Saul, whose course was rapidly descending towards the fatal field of Gilboa. The first king had proved a failure. The worst fears of Samuel were confirmed, his hopes were disappointed. With all the evident latent power in him, Saul had not risen to the opportunity. There had been a battle in his breast—a battle between God's will and self-will—and self-will had conquered. He is not going to be God's instrument, as the man who will rule Israel must be.

[1] W. E. Orchard, *The Evolution of the Old Testament*, 119.

Saul, it is said, "rejected the word of the Lord"; and the Lord rejected him from being king. For a time indeed he remained king, until his sin worked out to its sad end; but God had fixed upon another to take his place, and God's prophet, Samuel, was appointed to fulfil God's will and anoint the new king.

The mysterious call of Jehovah sent him to Bethlehem with the certainty of finding among Jesse's sons the king after Jehovah's own heart. The aged judge went thither as he was bid, causing the elders of the town no small alarm at first. He took a special sacrifice as the apparent occasion for his visit, called the elders and Jesse's family to the sacrificial meal, and keenly scanned the faces of Jesse's sons as they entered one after the other. At first Eliab, the eldest, pleased him, but the monitor within soon rejected him. One by one the sons of the old chief of Bethlehem passed before the man who was God's messenger, and none of them would pass muster. Still the prophet was seeking what he could not find. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in." There is the silent and puzzled group patiently or impatiently waiting. Only one man knows for what. And there breaks upon it this rustic youth, fresh from the field, bearing with him the scent of the sheepfold, with ruddy locks and parted lips, and the great eyes of a poet full of wonder. And even as he enters, it is revealed to Samuel that this is the future king, and the voice to which he has been accustomed to render implicit obedience says, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he." So David appears suddenly, and from the moment that he appears he captivates us who read the narrative; while for the history, the troubled history of the chosen people, his coming is as the dawn of a new day.

¶ The most consummate art could have taken no better way of heightening the effect of his first appearance than that adopted in this perfectly unartificial story, which leads us up a long avenue to where the shepherd boy stands. First, we have Samuel, with his regrets and objections; then Jesse with his seven stalwart sons; and at last, when expectation has been heightened by delay and by the minute previous details, the future king is disclosed—

a stripling with his ruddy locks glistening with the anointing oil, and his lovely eyes.[1]

¶ We are enabled to fix his appearance at once in our minds. It is implied that he was of short stature, thus contrasting with his tall brother Eliab, with his rival Saul, and with his gigantic enemy of Gath. He had red or auburn hair, such as is not unfrequently seen in his countrymen of the East at the present day. His bright eyes are especially mentioned, and generally he was remarkable for the grace of his figure and countenance ("fair of eyes," "comely," "goodly"), well made, and of immense strength and agility. In swiftness and activity, like his nephew Asahel, he could only be compared to the wild gazelle, with feet like harts' feet, with arms strong enough to break a bow of steel. He was pursuing the occupation usually allotted in Eastern countries to the slaves, the females or the despised of the family. He carried a switch or wand in his hand, such as would be used for his dogs, and a scrip or wallet round his neck, to carry anything that was needed for his shepherd's life, and a sling to ward off beasts or birds of prey. Such was the outer life of David, when he was "taken from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, to feed Israel according to the integrity of his heart, and to guide them by the skilfulness of his hands."[2]

(2) *The King's Minstrel.*—According to the earliest narrative (1 Sam. xvi. 14–23) David was already a mighty man of valour, one of the *Gibborim* who gathered about Saul, as the knights of the Round Table about King Arthur. The king had been attacked with morbid melancholy, called by the historian "an evil spirit from Jehovah." His servants suggested that a skilful player upon the harp should be brought to soothe the king with his music, and David, the son of Jesse, was chosen for this office. David's playing had the desired effect: Saul was roused from his gloomy fit. Perhaps the sight of the valiant youth, as well as converse with one whose faith was still fresh and untroubled, combined with the power of music and song to effect the cure. Saul came in time to love the youth.

¶ Browning's poem of *Saul* is the great illustration in literature of the playing of David before Saul. David comes with music and song, and even more with his humanity and faith, to try what may be done for the mad king. He tries all kinds of

[1] A. Maclaren.

[2] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 40.

song and all earthly appeals, and is only very partially successful. When impelled to save, he is driven by his very helplessness and yearning out upon God—on "the Christ in God"—and finds at length in that (when the whole feeling and resource of his nature has been roused) the saving help and vital power he was seeking. The Divine love and pity, the essential humanity of Deity, are our last ground of hope for such cases, and if, in a life such as ours and with men as they are, that be not a necessary truth, it is surely a beneficent and reasonable faith.[1]

¶ The culminating moment in the effort of David by which he rouses to life the sunken soul of the King, the moment towards which all others tend, is that in which he finds in his own nature love as God's ultimate gift, and assured that in this, as in other gifts, the creature cannot surpass the Creator, he breaks forth into a prophecy of God's love made perfect in weakness:

O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand![2]

(3) *The Slaying of Goliath.*—Another writer (1 Sam. xvii. E) puts David's introduction to Saul into more dramatic form. The armies of Israel and Philistia are encamped opposite, and neither is quite ready for an attack. By a custom not without its instances in other histories, one side proposes to settle things by a duel between two champions. But the challenger is a very big man, and the Israelites cannot find a man who is at all his match. After many challenges it happens that the shepherd boy from Bethlehem comes into camp to visit his elder brothers, hears the challenge, takes fire at it, and offers to meet the champion. The lad trained on the hills, who had single-handed hunted down the lion and the bear, was not likely to be dismayed by the bravo, huge and well armed as he was. Putting aside the armour offered by the king, he advances to meet the giant. He brings his opponent to the ground by a stone slung against his forehead, and then cuts off his head with his own sword. At the death of their champion the Philistines are dismayed; they

[1] J. Fotheringham, *Studies of the Mind and Art of Robert Browning*, 243.
[2] Edward Dowden, *Robert Browning*, 197.

break and flee in disorder, and the Israelites pursue them beyond the border.

Through all the manifold varieties of form which may have been assumed in the following centuries by this first great warlike exploit of David, it preserved its own peculiar importance, and all the many narrators whose traces we can detect are united in the feeling of its high significance. Even supposing these stories of successful prowess against Philistine giants had been told and applauded a hundred times in Israel, in no other spirit than that in which the Romans boasted of similar achievements against Gallic giants, or the Greeks of Odysseus' victory over Polyphemus, the feeling would still have been an honourable one, and would have sprung from a higher spiritual aspiration. For as the hero of inferior stature but of nervous arm, unshaken courage and superior skill, fights and conquers the terrible but uncouth and awkward giant, just so, in all essentials, do the nations which, though smaller, are yet spiritually active and artistically cultivated, contend against those which are stronger but less refined. In the victory of a David over a Goliath, the whole nation—unfortunate sometimes but never despondent—rejoices in its spiritual superiority over its mightier foes, who are certain, for all that, to be conquered again at last. And so these combats are the foreshadowing of future victories still greater and more extensive, the symbols of the first successful efforts of a general spirit of lofty aspiration; and the idea already manifested in Samson's life finds its embodiment again in David. But neither the heathen nor even Samson himself can rival the special glory, so prominent in David's case, and consonant with his whole nature, of a courage supported by the higher religion; and this peculiar elevation transforms this human strife into a public contest between two religions. The Philistine curses the apparently defenceless stripling by his national gods, whilst David, though not unskilled in war, trusts more than in anything else in the name of Jahveh of Armies, the God of Israel's battle array, and it is He who gives him courage and victory. And thus the twofold greatness of David and his whole age already steps into the foreground—the courage that is bold without rashness, which is inspired by the newly-wakened energy of the higher religion, and vindicates for itself a victorious freedom from even the

strongest and most threatening of its foes. And for this reason David is hailed as a hero.

¶ Let us look for the gospel of heroism, the inner history of brave hearts. Heroism is one of life's timeless things. It belongs to no age or place. It needs no interpretation. It tells its own story and wins its meed of acknowledgment. Do not misunderstand that. Heroism is a quiet thing. The hero is not often an orator; and even if he should be, his own heroism would never seem to him to be a fit subject for an oration. He exercises no self-repression in the matter. He says nothing, because he does not know of anything to say. The service of courage is a very simple, obvious, undistinguished thing in the eyes of those that render it. The hero is always a man of few words, and the less he tells us the more we know; the less he says the better we understand him. It is through the portal of silence that he comes to his own. If ever a man finds himself wishing that he could do some deed, make some sacrifice which would give him a name for courage, let him not think that he has (to use a current phrase and misleading at that) caught the heroic spirit, and that he is qualifying for a place in the roll of honour. Heroism lies not that way at all. Of all military honours, that which probably has been least consciously contended for is the Victoria Cross. It is self-forgetful love, and not self-regarding ambition, that wins that reward.

There is a sense in which we cannot have too high a conception of heroism. When in our mind we paint the picture of the ideal hero, we cannot make the light in his eyes too beautiful and the poise of his head too kingly. It is altogether good that we should so think of heroism as to prevent our offering the hero's crown to the essentially unheroic life. But we must lift our conception of life and the true terms of it and the spiritual setting of it and the constant issues of it till we come to see that the one man who can never hope to do justice to life is the hero. Surely the heroic spirit is not like the red bloom of the aloe that bursts upon the view once in a century! The inward conditions of its existence are constant and abiding. The hero's work was not finished when the last stake was set up in the market-place and the flame of the last martyr-fire flickered out. There is need of him while one poor soul in the city trembles under the shadow of tyranny, or writhes in the grip of unscrupulous power. The most real and awful tyranny in the world is the tyranny of sin. The hero knows that. That knowledge goes to the development of the hero. Where sin is an abstraction heroism is a dream. The gleam in the hero's eyes never came from the shimmer of a false optimism

or the glamour of a weak and soothesome view of the evil that is in the world.[1]

2. While there is a difficulty in harmonizing the stories of David's early life, we cannot doubt the uniform tradition that David performed wonderful exploits in the war with the Philistines, and so acquired favour in the eyes of Saul and all the people. By his valorous deeds and his modest behaviour he also gained the lifelong friendship of Jonathan, Saul's most valiant son. The two heroes exchanged armour in token of comradeship; and in the darker days that were near at hand David found in Jonathan a helpful and loyal friend.

¶ Dr. Mayo having asked Johnson's opinion of Soame Jenyns's "View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion";—JOHNSON. "I think it a pretty book; not very theological, indeed; and there seems to be an affectation of ease and carelessness, as if it were not suitable to his character to be very serious about the matter." BOSWELL. "*You* should like his book, Mrs. Knowles, as it maintains, as your *friends* do, that courage is not a Christian virtue." Mrs. KNOWLES. "Yes, indeed, I like him there; but I cannot agree with him that friendship is not a Christian virtue." JOHNSON. "Why, Madam, strictly speaking, he is right. All friendship is preferring the interest of a friend to the neglect, or, perhaps, against the interest, of others; so that an old Greek said, 'He that has *friends* has no *friend*.' Now, Christianity recommends universal benevolence; to consider all men as our brethren; which is contrary to the virtue of friendship, as described by the ancient philosophers. Surely, Madam, your sect [Quakers] must approve of this; for you call all men *friends*." Mrs. KNOWLES. "We are commanded to do good to all men, 'but especially to them who are of the household of faith.'" JOHNSON. "Well, Madam, the household of faith is wide enough." Mrs. KNOWLES. "But, Doctor, our Saviour had twelve apostles, yet there was *one* whom he *loved*. John was called 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.'" JOHNSON (with eyes sparkling benignantly). "Very well indeed, Madam. You have said very well." BOSWELL. "A fine application. Pray, Sir, had you ever thought of it?" JOHNSON. "I had not, Sir."[2]

Oh, gift of God, my friend!
Whose face has brought th' Eternal nigh;
No sermon like thy life doth tend
To turn my gaze toward the sky.

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *The Pilgrim Church*, 149. [2] Boswell, *Life of Johnson*.

Oh, ray of light, my friend!
When sorrow's gloom made life so drear,
Then comfort sweet thy words did lend,
As if Christ spake, "Be of good cheer!"

Oh, rock of strength, my friend!
When shifting sands beneath my feet,
And changing scenes my steps attend,
Thy truth and constancy are sweet.

Oh, home of rest, my friend!
When wearied with the toil and rush
My wistful gaze on thee I bend,
Then o'er my spirit falls a hush.

I clasp thy hand, my friend!
Thank God that thou art here;
I am not worthy He should send
To me a gift so dear.[1]

[1] Una, *In Life's Garden*, 12.

DAVID.

II.

At the Court of Saul.

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At the Court of Saul.

And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him.—1 Sam. xviii. 14.

The narrative relating the estrangement of Saul and David is one of the most perplexing in the Bible. Nothing in the ancient history of Israel aroused such interest as that romantic period in the career of the great king when his life was in danger at the hands of Saul. There must have been countless narratives of his friendship with Jonathan, of his daring exploits and hairbreadth escapes, of his courage and generosity, of his resourcefulness and shrewd sayings. The number of psalms ascribed to this period shows how great an interest it excited in after days. It is therefore permissible to regard these chapters as a collection of well-known stories about David, rather than as an orderly presentation of facts. The Alexandrian translators, however, have endeavoured with some success to give a connected account of the progress of Saul's estrangement from David by omitting various passages in 1 Sam. xvii.–xix. Thus the account of Saul's casting his spear at David is omitted and the promise of marriage with the elder daughter Merab; the gradual growth of Saul's jealousy is described, and each stage is appropriately emphasized with the words "Saul was afraid of David" (xviii. 12), "stood in awe of him" (xviii. 15), "was yet more afraid" (xviii. 29); and on account of the clear and consistent picture given in this version, many scholars accept the LXX text as original.

i. Saul's Jealousy.

It is not easy to trace the beginning of the distrust which Saul conceived for his young favourite, who had been promoted to the position of captain of the bodyguard (1 Sam. xxii. 14, LXX). Perhaps after all it is only natural that there should be some want of definiteness in the narratives. The facts could be known

only to those belonging to the innermost circle of the court, and all our records are written from the point of view of friends of David. If any ill-advised action on his part contributed to excite Saul's ill-will, we are told nothing about it. The main reason alleged for Saul's enmity is the jealousy of David's popularity and success in war, which is said to have been excited by the song of the women, who met the victorious warriors with the words, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." The situation was one to arouse jealousy, even in a better balanced mind than that of Saul. The kingship was not yet a well-established institution. To maintain his position the king must be recognized as the strongest man in his realm. Saul's authority rested almost entirely on his military achievements. Suddenly his glory had been eclipsed by that of another, who not only had the support of the powerful tribe of Judah but also was endowed with a unique personal charm.

¶ Jealousy is not one of the faults which are only the shadow of intelligence and reason; it is part of the animal inheritance of man. Faults such as untruthfulness, insincerity, irreverence, cynicism, are faults which come from the misuse of reason and imagination. But jealousy is simply a brutish fault, the selfish and spiteful dislike of seeing others enjoy what one would wish to enjoy oneself. It even goes deeper than that, and becomes, when deeply rooted, a mere dislike of seeing other people happy, even though one is happy oneself. There are people who like to spoil the grace of a gift by giving it grudgingly and conditionally; and worse still, there are people who like, if they can, to throw cold water over the enjoyment of others, and belittle or explain away their successes. I do not think so ill of human nature as to say that we are most of us deliberately pleased to hear of a misfortune happening to an acquaintance, but the feelings which it arouses are not as a rule those of unmixed sorrow; even the best people have a comfortable sense of heightened security resulting from the news, or at least a sense of thankfulness that the misfortune has not befallen themselves. To be whole-heartedly glad of the success or good fortune of an acquaintance is a sign of a really generous and kindly nature. We do most of us need to discipline ourselves in the matter, and we ought to encourage and nurture by every means in our power the sense of shame and self-contempt which, after all, we do feel on reflection at the thought of how little we are affected by pleasure at others' good fortune, or by sorrow at others' calamities. The apostolic command to

rejoice with those that rejoice and to weep with those that weep is by no means a platitude, but a very real and needful counsel of Christian conduct.[1]

ii. David's Courage.

For some time Saul kept his jealousy concealed, and David was publicly honoured. Saul appointed him to a command in the army, either as a mark of favour or because of his growing distrust; in any case, when David was removed from the royal presence, his popularity increased. Not only did the people love the young general, but he found favour in the eyes of Saul's daughter Michal. Saul, hoping to entrap him, sent courtiers to suggest that David should become his son-in-law, and that he should pay the dowry by slaying a hundred Philistines. David disappointed Saul's hope that his rashness would lead him to his death, and provided the dowry required by the king. The royal promise was kept, and Michal was married to David. The incident is truly Oriental. But David's courage in the face of open and serious danger is worthy of all admiration.

¶ There is no real courage unless there is real perception of danger. The man who does not comprehend the perils which surround him, and is therefore calm and collected, is not courageous; he is simply ignorant. And, in like manner, the unimaginative man, who has no consciousness of danger until he looks straight into its eyes, is not courageous; he is dull and sluggish. The highest courage is manifested only by the man who knows what he faces and fully realizes it. The duty of measuring one's power accurately in accepting responsibilities is often illustrated by the disasters which overtake those who fail to gauge their ability to endure or to achieve; but it is nobler to fail through excess of courage than through cowardice. Those who sit well housed, well warmed, and well fed often commend themselves as discreet users of opportunity and successful solvers of the problems of living, when, as a matter of fact, they are leaving the doors of opportunity unopened and evading the problems of life. Success in dealing with life consists in resolutely closing with it and measuring one's self fearlessly against its greatest forces. In such a world as this courage is the only safety; the coward is lost. There is no possible retreat and no place where one can hide himself; safety lies in pushing resolutely on through storm and darkness and danger. These are but the shadows on the path; for the brave they have no real existence. In such a

[1] A. C. Benson, *Along the Road*, 152.

world he who takes God at His word and ventures most is most cautious and far-seeing; and the more daring the faith, the greater the certainty of achievement. "God being with us, who can be against us?" It is our part to welcome responsibility, to crave the difficult work, to seek the dangerous duty; for these are our divinest opportunities of service and growth.[1]

iii. Jonathan's Love.

1. The jealousy of the king became at length so fierce and uncontrolled that it could no longer be hidden. He spoke openly of David's destruction, and even to Jonathan. Jonathan warned David, but Jonathan himself could hardly believe that it was more than passing frenzy on his father's part. He contrived to remonstrate with him, so that David could hear what was said, and so moved the king's heart at the moment that he himself was reassured, and David was also reassured, and presented himself as usual at court.

But a Philistine war soon brought him new laurels, and Saul new rage. A new fit of brooding melancholy seized the king. Unconscious of danger, David, as was his wont, was playing before him on the guitar, when Saul, transported to frenzy, cast his javelin at him, and tried to pin him to the wall. David evaded the weapon, escaped from Saul's presence, and fled to his own house. Saul's mind was now made up, apparently, to rid himself of his enemy: he had David's house surrounded by guards, who were to slay him when he came forth in the morning. The watchers were noticed by his wife Michal, who at once divined their intentions, and she let her husband down by a window on the other side of the house, while she placed in his bed the *teraphim* or household image, and covered it with the bed-clothes. When Saul's messengers came at his command to carry to the king the supposed sick man, bed and all, the trick was discovered, and Michal saved herself by pretending that it was in her own interests that David had escaped, lest Saul's daughter should share the fate of his son-in-law. "He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?" The trick gave David time to make good his escape from the district of Gibeah. Michal loved David well; could she only have shared his faith in God all had been well with her.

[1] H. W. Mabie, *The Life of the Spirit*, 118.

¶ You fancy, perhaps, as you have been told so often, that a wife's rule should only be over her husband's house, not over his mind. Ah, no! the true rule is just the reverse of that; a true wife in her husband's house is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen. Whatever of best he can conceive, it is her part to be; whatever of highest he can hope, it is hers to promise; all that is dark in him she must purge into purity, all that is failing in him she must strengthen into truth; from her, through all the world's clamour, he must win his praise; in her, through all the world's warfare, he must find his peace.[1]

2. An independent and parallel account of David's escape, and of previous efforts of Jonathan in his favour, is given in chap. xx., which goes back to a time when David was still at court, and when no one apparently suspected Saul's evil intentions but David himself. Jonathan could hardly be convinced that David's suspicions were well founded. The friends agreed, however, that David should remain in hiding for three days, and that Jonathan should draw Saul into a conversation about David, in which his real intentions might be discovered. The means taken by Jonathan to carry out his undertaking was to observe Saul's attitude when David's place at the royal table was seen to be empty. The first day of David's absence, Saul said nothing, thinking that some accidental ceremonial defilement had kept him from the royal table, where the meal would be a sacrificial one on this festal day. Next day, however, when David's seat was again empty, he asked Jonathan about him, and on receiving the reply agreed on—that David had gone to Bethlehem to take part in a family festival—broke out into most vulgar and violent insults of Jonathan for befriending David, and actually flung his javelin-sceptre to slay him too. Jonathan left the table "in fierce anger," and, recognizing that matters were hopeless, went to give David, in his hiding-place, the news by a secret code already arranged between them. The fatal word was heard by David in his hiding-place—"Is not the arrow beyond thee? Make speed, haste, stay not." Neither the boy with the quiver, nor any other hearer but David, was the wiser. David, however, abandoning the attempt at secrecy, rose out of his hiding-place as soon as the boy had been sent back to the town, took a pathetic and tearful

[1] Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive*, § 129.

farewell of his loyal and self-sacrificing friend, and henceforth, till Saul's death, was a refugee and an outlaw.

It was a bitter parting; both of them were conscious of a terrible cloud hanging over them. The soul of Jonathan, especially, seems to have been overcast with the impression that their happy intercourse would never again be renewed; therefore he pledged David with that pathetic vow, to be faithful to his seed, and to remember their love when all his enemies had been cut off. "Go in peace," Jonathan said finally, as though he could no longer bear the awful anguish of that parting, "forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, for ever." Then David arose and departed to become a fugitive and an outlaw, liable at any moment to capture and violent death; whilst Jonathan returned thoughtfully and sadly to the palace, where he must spend the rest of his life in contact with one who had no sympathy with his noble sentiments, and had outraged his tenderest sensibilities.

¶ For every David there lives a Saul. But for every David there lives also a Jonathan. "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Yes; but from that day and forward Jonathan loved him as his own soul, and spent his life in ministering to David's slow but sure advance. How dreadful an enmity the enmity of the father! How rare a friendship the friendship of the son! His robe, his sword, his bow, his girdle—all are at the service of this young man, minded to do and dare, and so carry on the great traditions of a people chosen of the Lord. So in the same hour entered into David's life a mighty, relentless foe, and a royal, faithful, tireless friend. And the friend always comes.[1]

¶ Rutherford was the spy chosen by Jesus Christ to go out first of all the ministers of Scotland into the life of banishment in that day, so as to try its fords and taste its vineyards, and to report to God's straitened and persecuted people at home. To begin with, it must always be remembered that Rutherford was not laid in irons in Aberdeen, or cast into a dungeon. He was simply deprived of his pulpit and of his liberty to preach, and was sentenced to live in silence in the town of Aberdeen. Like Dante, another great spy of God's providence and grace, Rutherford was less a prisoner than an exile. But if any man

[1] J. Dodd Jackson.

thinks that simply to be an exile is a small punishment, or a light cross, let him read the psalms and prophecies of Babylon, the *Divine Comedy*, and Rutherford's *Letters*. Yes, banishment was banishment; exile was exile; silent Sabbaths were silent Sabbaths; and a borrowed fireside with all its willing heat was still a borrowed fireside; and, spite of all that the best people of Aberdeen could do for Samuel Rutherford, he felt the friendliest stairs of that city to be very steep to his feet, and its best bread to be very salt in his mouth.[1]

3. Jonathan's love was truly great; it was no blossom of nature's growth—it was the fruit of the operation of the Spirit of God, such as one could almost scarcely look for in such perfection in the time of the Old Covenant. His was the love that sacrifices all for the loved one. Humanly speaking, he had nothing to gain from his friendship with the youthful harpist, while the advantages to David of a friend of Jonathan's position were unlimited. But David's side of the friendship was also truly heroic, for it had its dangers. David's position at Saul's court was a most difficult one. His life was sought, both openly and by plot and intrigue, and, with the change in the king's mood, envious, rancorous tongues would not be wanting to shoot their shafts at him. But, amidst all, as David showed no vanity or pride in the day of his prosperity, so now he makes no attempt, by counter-intrigue, to retaliate upon or overthrow his enemies, in the day of adversity. Saul deals wrongly towards him, but he behaves with unimpeachable fidelity towards Saul. "He behaved himself wisely," the history informs us. Under all the honours with which he saw himself loaded, he remained master of his spirit, and always like himself. However high they raised him, his heart did not raise itself. In all his actions he conducted himself as became an obedient and submissive servant of his king. David was endowed with natural qualities which could not but tend to promote this sincere and confiding friendship on the part of Jonathan; David's noble self-respect, always associated with unfeigned modesty and humility, as well as his whole general demeanour, as far removed from an unworthy over-estimation of the honour conferred upon him through the favour of the king's son as his conduct toward that like-minded youth was removed from everything like pre-

[1] A. Whyte, *Samuel Rutherford and Some of his Correspondents*, 4.

sumptuous arrogance—how could this fail to gain the whole heart of his friend?

¶ How were Friendship possible? In mutual devotedness to the Good and True: otherwise impossible, except as Armed Neutrality, or hollow Commercial League. A man, be the Heavens ever praised, is sufficient for himself; yet were ten men, united in Love, capable of being and of doing what ten thousand singly would fail in. Infinite is the help man can yield to man.[1]

¶ The miracle of friendship has been too often enacted on this dull earth of ours to suffer us to doubt either its possibility or its wondrous beauty. The classic instance of David and Jonathan represents the typical friendship. They met, and at the meeting knew each other to be nearer than kindred. By subtle elective affinity they felt that they belonged to each other. Out of all the chaos of the time and the disorder of their lives, there arose for these two souls a new and beautiful world, where there reigned peace, and love, and sweet content. It was the miracle of the death of self. Jonathan forgot his pride, and David his ambition. It was as the smile of God which changed the world to them. One of them it saved from the temptations of a squalid court, and the other from the sourness of an exile's life. Jonathan's princely soul had no room for envy or jealousy. David's frank nature rose to meet the magnanimity of his friend. In the kingdom of love there was no disparity between the king's son and the shepherd boy. Such a gift as each gave and received is not to be bought or sold. It was the fruit of the innate nobility of both: it softened and tempered a very trying time for both. Jonathan withstood his father's anger to shield his friend: David was patient with Saul for his son's sake. They agreed to be true to each other in their difficult position. Close and tender must have been the bond which had such fruit in princely generosity and mutual loyalty of soul. Fitting was the beautiful lament, when David's heart was bereaved at tragic Gilboa, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Love is always wonderful, a new creation, fair and fresh to every loving soul. It is the miracle of spring to the cold, dull earth.[2]

> You ask me "why I like him." Nay,
> I cannot; nay, I would not, say.
> I think it vile to pigeonhole
> The pros and cons of a kindred soul.

[1] Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus.* [2] Hugh Black, *Friendship*, 24.

You "wonder he should be my friend."
But then why should you comprehend?
Thank God for this—a new—surprise:
My eyes, remember, are not your eyes.

Cherish this one small mystery;
And marvel not that love can be
"In spite of all his many flaws."
In spite? Supposing I said "Because."

A truce, a truce to questioning:
"We two are friends" tells everything.
Yet if you must know, this is why:
Because he is he and I am I.[1]

[1] E. V. Lucas.

DAVID.

III.

The Outlaw.

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The Outlaw.

And David was greatly distressed . . . but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.—1 Sam. xxx. 6.

David's flight is the subject of several traditions. It is only natural that many stories of his adventures should have been current among the people long before they were written down; and many a place in the wilds of Judah would doubtless claim to be the site of some memorable event in the outlaw life of the great national hero; while from 1 Sam. xxx. 26–31 it is clear that we possess but a fragmentary account of his many wanderings.

According to the First Book of Samuel, David, after escaping from Saul's messengers, fled first to Ramah, where he took refuge with Samuel at a prophetic school. But Saul was too desperate to respect even a sanctuary. Messengers sent by him hurried to Ramah as soon as David was known to be there. But they were so carried away by religious enthusiasm, from hearing the exercises of Samuel's pupils, that they could not help joining the prophets, and forgot their message. A second and a third band fared no better. At last, Saul himself determined to head a fourth band; but the sights and sounds of a spot so venerable had the same effect on him as on others. Seized by a fit of prophetic excitement, he too joined in the hymns and psalms of the prophet choir, till, like a modern dervish, he rose to such a frenzy that he tore off his mantle and fell down in a state of stupor which lasted a day and a night. This event gave rise to a common Israelite by-word for something totally incongruous and out of place: "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

Grave doubts, however, have been raised regarding this narrative. For a Judæan like David, flight southwards was more natural from Gibeah than northwards to Ramah; the connexion between Samuel and the prophets is not that presented by the older history of Saul and Samuel, where indeed there is

another explanation given of the proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. x. 11 f.); while the present narrative can hardly be by the author of chap. xv., who implies (ver. 35) that Saul and Samuel did not meet again. The conception of the prophetic school as here described is probably later than the time of David; and we must regard it as at least doubtful whether David had on this occasion any dealings with Samuel.

i. Nob.

1. If we reject the Ramah narrative, the first place visited by David in his flight was the city of Nob, a little to the north of Jerusalem. It seems that the priesthood of Eli's house had removed to this place after the destruction of Shiloh; so that Nob was at this time one of the chief sanctuaries of Israel. Ahimelech, the priest of the sanctuary, showed all honour to David, evidently regarding him still as the king's favourite; but he was amazed to see him travelling alone. David, fearing to be suspected, professed to have received a secret commission from Saul, and one requiring special haste; and he persuaded Ahimelech to give him of the sacred bread of the sanctuary, as well as to inquire of the oracle for him. Ahimelech is said also to have given to David the sword of Goliath, which was kept wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.

David acted in this emergency more according to what is called diplomacy than according to truth. He was wrong to tell that lie to Ahimelech; it was due to weakness of faith. When David forgot God's promises and past deliverances, he became, like Samson shorn of his locks, weak as another man. Though Christ Himself referred to this incident without condemning David (Matt. xii. 3 ff.), this does not extenuate his sin. Evidently his faith was beginning to falter. He was looking at God through the mist of circumstances, which certainly to the eye of sense were sufficiently threatening, instead of looking at circumstances through the golden haze of God's very present help.

¶ The same state of mind, looked at from its two opposite ends, as it were, may be designated faith or unbelief; just as a piece of shot silk, according to the angle at which you hold it, may show you only the bright colours of its warp or the dark ones of its weft. When you are travelling in a railway train with the sun streaming in at the windows, if you look out on the one hand, you will see the illumined face of every tree and blade of

grass and house; and if you look out on the other, you will see the dark side. And so the same landscape may seem to be all lit up by the sunshine of belief, or to be darkened by the gloom of distrust.[1]

2. Ahimelech's act of friendliness brought upon the city of the priests a cruel vengeance. Informed by Doeg the Edomite, his chief herdsman, of the welcome which David had received at Nob, Saul summoned Ahimelech the priest to his presence, taxed him with an act of conspiracy, and gave orders for the immediate massacre of the entire priestly clan. When the king's officers hesitated to execute the sacrilegious order, Doeg himself undertook the task. The priests and all the other inhabitants of the city of Nob were put to the sword. Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, alone escaped, and fled to David in the wilderness of Judah, bearing with him the oracular ephod.

The consequences of David's conduct show that he was wrong; and he confessed it to Abiathar, when he said, "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house" (1 Sam. xxii. 22).

¶ The false representation by reason of which Ahimelech was induced to give David bread and a sword was the real wrong. On a wider survey of facts, and with a juster estimate of the risks of compromising the officials of the sanctuary, he would probably have sought food in some other quarter, or have cried out to God for special deliverance. As it was, his device of being on Saul's business was evidently intended to save the high priest from the political sin of aiding one outlawed by the king. But his good motives were entirely useless because the overt act was witnessed by an enemy who, David felt sure, would put on it a construction inconsistent with his own wishes and the knowledge of the high priest. His conduct, therefore, pure in intention and fenced with precaution, did compromise a band of innocent men, and was the occasion of the fearful slaughter of the priests and entire population of the city. The guilt of the slaughter rested on Saul; the occasion for the exercise of the murderous malice was unwittingly created by David. With a sorrowful heart he admits the great woe to have had its origin incidentally in his own action. It is a truism that every action carries with it consequences into the future, in which we ourselves and others are concerned. One of the effects of our action is to prompt the

[1] A. Maclaren, *The Wearied Christ.*

action of other men, or to modify the course which otherwise they would have taken. And as the interests of many may depend not on what we do directly but on the conduct of others whom we directly affect, it is obvious that it is often possible for us to perform deeds or pursue courses which shall give occasion for other men to perpetrate great wrongs on those we would gladly shield. In the memory of many a man there are records of deeds unwise and out of season, which have left a fatal mark on the world in spite of subsequent efforts of wisdom and goodness. Like David, men can say, "I have occasioned" all this.[1]

3. David fled from Nob to Gath. Here at the court of Achish he was recognized as the Israelite warrior, and "king of the land." He was instantly regarded with hatred, as having slain his ten thousands. By some means David became aware of the evil impression at court, and saw the immense peril in which he stood of imprisonment or execution. He saved himself by descending to the unworthy subterfuge of counterfeiting the behaviour of a madman, drumming on the leaves of the city gate, and allowing his spittle to fall down upon his beard. His device succeeded; and Achish dismissed him with the humorous remark to his servants that he had already madmen enough around him, and had no need of another.

¶ It may have been a harmless and successful device to simulate madness; but self-respect was gone, and a "more excellent way" of escape might have been sought of God. This is the great peril of us all both in prosperity and in adversity. The guise under which the simulation appears is varied. An appearance of wealth covers real poverty; a geniality of manner is adopted when real aversion lies in the heart; a pretence of ill-health secures escape from obligations; ambiguous words and evasions are employed to suggest our ignorance of matters when we know them well. To be real, to be known to be just what we are, is the only safe and wise course for a true Christian.

¶ Certainly the ablest men that ever were have had all an openness and frankness of dealing, and a name of certainty and veracity. But then they were like horses well managed; for they could tell passing well when to stop or turn. There be three disadvantages of Simulation and Dissimulation. The first, that Simulation and Dissimulation commonly carry with them a show of fearfulness, which, in any business, doth spoil the feathers

[1] C. Chapman.

of round flying up to the mark. The second, that it puzzleth and perplexeth the conceits of many, that perhaps would otherwise co-operate with him, and makes a man walk almost alone to his own ends. The third, and greatest, is, that it depriveth a man of one of the most principal instruments for action; which is trust and belief.[1]

ii. Adullam.

More reliable, however, is the account in xxii. 1 ff., according to which David fled (from Nob) to the cave, or stronghold of Adullam. This stronghold lay probably in the west of Judah, nor far from Socoh and Azekah and the Vale of Elah. It was an ancient royal town of the Canaanites, and may have been in their possession when David came seeking protection from Saul's wrath. In this town or in its neighbourhood David found security, and he did not remain long alone. All sorts of people joined him, not perhaps as rebels against Saul or the kingdom, but rather as men who were determined to resist the Philistines under the only capable leader of the time. Saul's godlessness and frenzy were ruining the nation. He was absorbed by a passion of jealousy and murder, directed against his most powerful adherent. To the cave of Adullam, accordingly, all who felt aggrieved at the state of Israel flocked, so to speak, to David's standard. The young leader soon found himself at the head of four hundred men. He was fain to welcome every one who came with arms in his hand and with a stout heart; himself outlawed, he had perforce to join company with men who had broken the law as well as with innocent sufferers from it. But it would appear from the account given in the Chronicles that they were right valiant men, and it has been thought that it was at this time that David's close connexion with his nephews, the sons of his sister Zeruiah, began. Abishai, the brother of Joab, is especially mentioned at the time. David's aged parents, also, afraid of the vengeance of Saul, soon made their way to him from Bethlehem, and threw themselves on his care. It was, no doubt, with a view to provide them with a quieter refuge than Adullam afforded that David sent them beyond the Jordan, and secured for them the hospitality of the king of Moab, a step which may perhaps be explained by reference to the Book of Ruth, where David's descent is traced from Ruth the

[1] Bacon's *Essays*: "Of Simulation and Dissimulation."

Moabitess. That double journey, first to secure the shelter, and then to escort the aged couple thither, evinces a pleasing trait in David's character. There was no lack of obedience to the first commandment with promise.

¶ The filial piety of Pope was in the highest degree amiable and exemplary. His parents had the happiness of living till he was at the summit of poetical reputation—till he was at ease in his fortune, and without a rival in his fame, and found no diminution of his respect or tenderness. Whatever was his pride, to them he was obedient; and whatever was his irritability, to them he was gentle. Life has, amongst its soothing and quiet comforts, few things better to give than such a son.[1]

iii. Keilah.

1. According to 1 Sam. xxii. 5, a verse of which the connexion is somewhat obscure, David, on the advice of the prophet Gad, removed from his stronghold to the forest of Hareth; but he is certainly again in the Shephêlah when we next hear of him. David hears in his mountain fastnesses that the Philistines are approaching Keilah, and have spoiled the threshing-floors, and he inquires of the Lord through the oracle which Abiathar had brought with him. It was obviously a great gain to David to have at hand this priceless method of communication between Jehovah and himself. Already Gad was with him, as the representative of the prophetic office; now Abiathar and the ephod represented the most precious prerogative of the priesthood. By one or other of these, and probably in these earlier days especially by the latter, David was able, he believed, at any moment to know the will of God.

¶ The nature of the ephod, or oracle, is unknown. Probably it was simply a contrivance by which to cast a sacred lot. The interpretation, however, belonged to the priest. A rare opportunity was thus given for this enlightened representative of Jehovah, under the protection of his sacred office and with Divine authority, to counsel David and his followers at each crisis in their varying fortunes.[2]

2. "And the Lord said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah" (xxiii. 2). David accordingly marched to the place and drove the enemy away with great slaughter. The

[1] Johnson, *Lives of the Poets.* [2] C. F. Kent.

people of Keilah welcomed their deliverer; and David would have continued in the place, which was more commodious than Adullam for his growing army, had he not heard that Saul was making great preparations against him. When Saul heard that David had shut himself in, by entering into a town that had gates and bars, it seemed to him almost as if judicial blindness had fallen upon him, or, as the king put it: "Elohim has rejected him into my hand." So thinking, Saul rapidly gathered a force to march against Keilah. But David knew his danger, and in his extremity once more appealed to the Lord. Being told that the men of Keilah, if forced to choose between the king and himself, would not scruple to save themselves by surrendering their deliverer, David and his company, now increased to about six hundred, left the town, and betook themselves once more to strongholds in the "hill-country" of Judah, this time in the district of Ziph, three miles south-east of Hebron.

¶ The story of David's wanderings is one of the most interesting episodes of the Old Testament, and we have now so recovered its topography that the various scenes seem as vivid as if they had occurred only yesterday. First we have the stronghold of Adullam, guarding the rich corn valley of Elah; then Keilah, a few miles south, perched on its steep hill above the same valley. The forest of Hareth lay close by, surrounded by the "thickets" which properly represent the Hebrew "Yar"—a word wrongly supposed to mean a woodland of timber trees.

Driven from all these lairs, David went yet farther south to the neighbourhood of Ziph (Tell Zif); and here also our English version speaks of a forest—the "Wood (Choresh) of Ziph," where David met with Jonathan. A moment's reflection will, however, convince any traveller that no wood of trees could have flourished over this unwatered and sun-scorched region. The true explanation seems to be that the word Choresh is a proper name with a different signification, and such is the view of the Greek version and of Josephus. We are able considerably to strengthen this theory by the discovery of the ruin of Khoreisa and the Valley of Hiresh (the same word under another form), close to Ziph, the first of which may well be thought to represent the Hebrew Choresh Ziph.

The treachery of the inhabitants of Ziph, like that of the men of Keilah, appears to have driven David to a yet more desolate district, that of the Jeshimon, or "Solitude," by which is apparently intended the great desert above the western shores of

the Dead Sea, on which the Ziph plateau looks down. As a shepherd boy at Bethlehem, David may probably have been already familiar with this part of the country, and the caves, still used as sheep-cotes by the peasant herdsmen, extend all along the slopes at the edge of the desert.

East of Ziph is a prominent hill on which is the ruined town called Cain in the Bible; hence the eye ranges over the theatre of David's wanderings. On the south are the wolds of the Negeb plateau, with the plains of Beersheba beyond. On the east is the "Solitude," with white peaks and cones of chalk, and deep, narrow watercourses, terminated by the great pointed cliff of Ziz, above Engedi, and by the precipices over the Dead Sea, two thousand feet high. Here, among the "rocks of the wild goats," the herds of ibex may be seen bounding, and the partridge is still chased on the mountains, as David was followed by the stealthy hunter Saul. The blue sea is visible in its deep chasm, and is backed by the dark precipice of Kerak, "scarred with a hundred wintry watercourses." The great hump of rock on which Maon — the home of Nabal—stands is seen to the south, and rather nearer is the Crusading castle at Carmel, where were Nabal's possessions; the ruined mound of Ziph is to the west, and Juttah among its olives. Thus the whole scenery of the flight of David, and of Saul's pursuit, can be viewed from this one hill. The stronghold chosen by the fugitive was the hill Hachilah, in the wilderness of Ziph, south of Jeshimon. This I would propose to recognize in the long ridge called El Kôlah, running out of the Ziph plateau towards the Dead Sea desert, or Jeshimon. On the north side of the hill are the "Caves of the Dreamers," perhaps the actual scene of David's descent on Saul's sleeping guards.

Pursued even to Hachilah, David descended farther south, to a rock or cliff in the wilderness of Maon, which was named Sela Ham-mahlekoth, "Cliff of Divisions" (1 Sam. xxiii. 2–8). Here he is represented as being on one side of the mountain, while Saul was on the other. Now between the ridge of El Kôlah and the neighbourhood of Maon there is a great gorge called "the Valley of Rocks," a narrow but deep chasm, impassable except by a detour of many miles, so that Saul might have stood within sight of David, yet quite unable to overtake his enemy; and to this "Cliff of Divisions" the name Malâky now applies, a word closely approaching the Hebrew Mahlekoth. The neighbourhood is seamed with many torrent-beds, but there is no other place near Maon where cliffs such as are to be inferred from the word Sela can be found. It seems to me pretty safe, therefore, to look on this gorge as the scene of the wonderful escape of David,

due to a sudden Philistine invasion, which terminated the history of his hair-breadth escapes in the South Country.[1]

iv. Ziph and Maon.

1. This was about the lowest ebb in David's fortunes. The king was searching for him every day with a malignity which made it evident that he had come out to seek his life. But what the enmity of Saul could not do the love of Jonathan accomplished, for by some means he found out where David was, and paid him a visit in a wood. Constant tension of mind had begun to exhaust David's courage, and we are told that Jonathan "strengthened his hand in God." Jonathan recognized that God had already fully marked out David for the throne of Israel, and expressed his confidence that his father's enmity would not be able to harm him. For himself he desired only to be next in honour to David, though he was older, and Saul's son. The two friends renewed their covenant "before the Lord," and parted, never to meet in life again. Jonathan's sense of honour and faithfulness to duty carried him on to stand by his father, even in his ruin, to the last, but the farewell was the farewell of friends who had to part and had to suffer, but whose love was consecrated by their devotion to duty and their love of God.

¶ In the summer, Carlyle and his wife ran down for a short holiday at Scotsbrig, giving a few brief days to Templand, and a glance at Craigenputtock. By August they were again settled in Comely Bank. The Carlyles, as he said long before, were a clannish set, and clung tenaciously together. The partings after ever so brief a visit were always sorrowful. On his return home, Carlyle wrote to his Mother at Scotsbrig;—"My dear Mother,—It was a pity that we were all so *wae* that day we went off; but we cannot well help it. This life is but a series of meetings and partings, and many a tear one might shed, while these 'few and evil days' pass over us. But we hope there is another scene to which this is but the passage, where good and holy affections shall live as in their home, and for true friends there shall be no more partings appointed. God grant we may all have our lot made sure in that earnest and enduring country; for surely this world, the more one thinks of it, seems the more fluctuating, hollow,

[1] C. R. Conder, *Tent Work in Palestine*, 243.

and unstable. What are its proudest hopes but bubbles on the stream of time, which the next rushing wave will scatter into air?"[1]

2. The problem which confronted David, that of supporting his six hundred restless warriors in the thickly peopled, unproductive border-land of southern Judah, was exceedingly difficult. Occasional forays against hostile Arab tribes in part supplied their needs; but for the most part they were dependent upon the gifts of the neighbouring friendly clans and the profits of freebooting. In the pressing need of the situation, it is too probable that the rights of property were often disregarded; and no doubt there were some who would willingly have seen the district rid of such high-handed outlaws. David apparently made himself obnoxious to the neighbouring people of Ziph; they acted the part of traitorous spies, and reported David's whereabouts to the king. Hearing of this treachery, David moved farther south to the wilderness of Maon, where a conical hill gives a far extended view of the surrounding country. But to the spot the men of Ziph conducted the king with such deadly accuracy that, before they could escape, the little beleagured band found the hill on which they gathered surrounded by the royal troops, and their escape rendered impossible. Like a miraculous deliverance, news of a Philistine raid came to Saul, and he was compelled to withdraw his army to meet them.

¶ The inscription on the obelisk in the downs at Scheveningen, "God saved Nederland," is the summary of the history of thousands saved from temporal or spiritual destruction. "Rock of escape." How many spots are there on our pilgrimage where we might express the same sentiment: preserved or delivered from apparent danger as we were, perhaps through a seeming accident, as unexpectedly but as decisively as here by the message to Saul! Oh that we may never forget God's goodness, and in the severest trouble cling to the Rock of Ages! On Golgotha He has prepared a rock of deliverance also for the chief of sinners. He who takes refuge there has nothing more to fear even from the last foe, and sees himself finally, like David, surrounded on all sides by joyful songs of deliverance. Oh, ye who can bear witness: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling," let not this note, moreover, die on your

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1835*, i. 408.

lips: "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. cxvi. 8, 9).[1]

3. One of the most detailed and most reliable accounts which we possess of the whole period of David's wanderings relates to the time when he was still in the region of Maon. Nabal, a wealthy sheep-owner of Maon, was celebrating the feast of sheep-shearing at Carmel, when David sent messengers to him requesting a contribution in return for the protection he had afforded to his herdsmen and flocks. Nabal was little inclined to favour the freebooters, still less to contribute to their support; he returned an insolent answer. David at once ordered his men to arm, and advanced to chastise the man who had defied him; and it would have gone hard with Nabal had it not been for his wife, Abigail, who anticipated David's intended vengeance by winning words and a handsome present.

¶ In demanding a liberal gift from Nabal, the wealthy Calebite, whose flocks and shepherds David's followers had protected, David was standing squarely on the customary law of the wilderness. In repudiating his obligations Nabal defied that law; but for David to have followed the impulse of the moment and turned his sword against a friendly clan would have been suicidal to his interests.[2]

¶ On the 22nd of October we marched south, to camp at Yuttah, the ancient Levitical town of Yuttah, five miles south of Hebron. In the neighbourhood of Yuttah, Dûra, and Yekin, the country descends by a sudden step, and forms a kind of plateau, divided into two by the great valley which runs from north of Hebron to Beersheba, and thence west, to Gerar, and the sea. The plateau is about 2600 feet above sea-level, and 500 feet below the general level of the Hebron watershed. It has only two inhabited villages on it, but is covered with ruins. It is dry and treeless, but rich in flocks and herds. It seems to have been the country of the Horites, for the place is riddled with caves intended for habitations, and the name of this troglodytic race is preserved in the titles of two of the ruined towns. The plateau formed part of the district called Negeb, or "dry land," in the Bible. One is at once struck with the fitness which the plateau presents for the adventures of the fugitive bandit chief who was destined to become the king of Israel. The inhabitants, like

[1] J. J. van Oosterzee, *The Year of Salvation*, ii. 441.
[2] C. F. Kent.

Nabal of Carmel, are rich in sheep and oxen. The villagers of Yuttah owned 1700 sheep, of which 250 belonged to the sheikh. All along the borders of the Jeshimon and Beersheba deserts there is the fine pasturage, to which the peasants descend in spring-time, having made some sort of agreement with the neighbouring Bedawin to protect them from other tribes. Thus we find perpetuated the old system under which David's band protected the cattle of Nabal.[1]

¶ The relationship between Arab tribes and the settled inhabitants in regard to their flocks and herds was once illustrated to me in a very agreeable way, when I had to do with a veritable Nabal and a Bedawee David. Travelling in Moab in the month of February, our whole party were taken prisoners by the chief of Kerak (Kir-Moab), and confined by him in the famous crusading castle. We were on our way to visit a powerful tribe, the Beni Sakk'r, whose sheikh was an old friend of mine, with whom I had travelled in previous years. Having heard of our detention, he suddenly one day appeared most unexpectedly, with only two mounted companions, and announced his intention of leaving with us next morning. Our captor demurred, and told him he must have a ransom. The sheikh, with a calmness unlike David, quietly observed, "You men of Kerak have hundreds of camels with their young, and thousands of sheep with their lambs, out on our plains. The Beni Sakk'r have been a wall to them all these months, and now you ask ransom for my brothers. Nay, my friends; but if we return not within two days, your camels and goats will travel farther, even to our camp, and I shall weep for the losses of you, my friends, but my people will not make them good." I scarcely need to add that the argument was found unanswerable, and that we set off the next morning.[2]

4. Nabal died soon after; and David, who felt that now Jehovah had indeed defended his cause, took Abigail to wife. He thus established a powerful family connexion with the south of Judah, and he further increased his influence by marriage with Ahinoam of the southern Jezreel.

Throughout all their history, polygamy seems to have been the exception rather than the rule among the Hebrews. The tribal chieftains and kings were almost the only ones who appear to have indulged in this pernicious Oriental institution. Their object was to extend their power and influence by means of

[1] C. R. Conder, *Tent Work in Palestine*, 242.

[2] H. B. Tristram, *Eastern Customs in Bible Lands*, 119.

alliances with neighbouring tribes and peoples. The accepted method of sealing such alliances was by intermarriage. The fact that David, even during his outlaw life, had two wives in addition to Michal—whom Saul had given to another husband—reveals the ambition which was already beginning to stir within the mind of the young Judæan leader. His marriage with Abigail was apparently prompted by true love. It brought to him a sane and devoted counsellor. It also strengthened still further his position among the tribes of the south country. Thus at every step David was increasing his hold upon the Hebrews of the south, and preparing for the moment when they should choose their own king. But at the same time he was preparing serious trouble for himself.

¶ The law of monogamy is not found formally enunciated in the Hebrew Scriptures, yet the love of one for one is unquestionably a Hebrew ideal. "They twain shall be one flesh" is a very ancient Divine precept, contained in the earliest stratum of Genesis. "The marriage of one man and one woman is to form the fundamental indissoluble relationship before which all other ties, even the most sacred, must give way" (Schultz). Almost every specimen of polygamy given in the Bible is so thoroughly bad that no one can doubt its radical wrongness even in its mildest form. Pure love bestows incomparable happiness, impure love creates piteous tragedies. True religion, which is the foundation of the highest and holiest manhood and womanhood, is the best friend of the home and the best guardian of its sanctities. Love refined, purified, and consecrated by faith is necessarily opposed to polygamy. "These devices, which produced such irregularities and heart-burnings in the families of the patriarchs," says Dr. Thomson in *The Land and the Book*, "are equally mischievous at the present day. The whole system is productive of evil, and that only, to the individual, the family, and the community." Polygamy is the profanation of marriage and the degradation of woman. True religion emancipates woman, raises her to spiritual equality with man, and restores marriage to its proper dignity and purity. The Hebrew ideal of wedded life—the entire self-surrender and mutual delight of two souls—is expressed in the exquisite idyll of the Song of Songs: "My beloved is mine, and I am his."[1]

¶ Although polygamy occurs among most existing peoples, and polyandry among some, monogamy is by far the most common

[1] J. Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*, i. 88.

form of human marriage. It was so among the ancient peoples of whom we have any direct knowledge. Monogamy is the form which is generally recognized and permitted. The great majority of peoples are, as a rule, monogamous, and the other forms of marriage are usually modified in a monogamous direction. We may without hesitation assert that, if mankind advance in the same direction as hitherto; if, consequently, the causes to which monogamy in the most progressive societies owes its origin continue to operate with constantly growing force; if, especially, altruism increases, and the feeling of love becomes more refined, and more exclusively directed to one—the laws of monogamy can never be changed, but must be followed much more strictly than they are now.[1]

¶ In all those regions in which polygamy has existed or still exists, the status of woman is extremely low; she is treated as man's property, not as his companion; her life is invariably one of great hardship, while her moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities are almost utterly neglected. Even the male human being is in the highest sense of the phrase naturally monogamous. His moral, spiritual, and æsthetic faculties can obtain normal development only when his sexual relations are confined to one woman in the common life and enduring association provided by monogamy. The welfare of the children, and, therefore, of the race, obviously demands that the offspring of each pair shall have the undivided attention and care of both their parents. When we speak of the naturalness of any social institution, we necessarily take as our standard, not nature in a superficial or one-sided sense, or in its savage state, or as exemplified in a few individuals or in a single generation, but nature adequately considered, in all its needs and powers, in all the members of the present and of future generations, and as it appears in those tendencies which lead toward its highest development. The verdict of experience and the voice of nature reinforce, consequently, the Christian teaching on the unity of marriage.[2]

[1] E. Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage*, 510.
[2] J. A. Ryan, in *The Catholic Encyclopædia*, ix. 695.

DAVID.

IV.

HEBRON.

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Hebron.

And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.—2 Sam. ii. 3.

David was now forced to take refuge among the precipitous cliffs of Engedi on the shores of the Dead Sea. The place is well suited to be the home of outlaws, abounding as it does in caverns, where they can remain securely hidden. Here Saul is said to have incautiously placed himself in David's power, and to have owed his life to the generous forbearance of his rival. Of all stories of this adventurous period of the life of David none would be more frequently told than the one about his sparing Saul's life.

Two versions of it are preserved, bearing a certain resemblance to one another, but differing in detail. That chap. xxvi. refers to a second occasion seems antecedently improbable; and this impression is confirmed on comparing the two narratives. Each is introduced by an offer of the Ziphites to betray David's hiding-place to Saul (1 Sam. xxiii. 19, xxvi. 1); each ends with a confession of David's noble conduct placed in the mouth of Saul; and a careful comparison of the language shows either literary dependence of one upon the other or the dependence of both on some common tradition.

It is not necessary to enter into any detailed comparison of the two accounts; both agree that Saul was in David's power to spare or to slay, and that he, in spite of all the wrongs he had suffered at Saul's hands, chose to spare, and even restrained his companions from seizing what they regarded as a Divinely given opportunity for vengeance. It is true that David's action may have been partly due to what we might now regard as superstition; as king, anointed to his office by Samuel the prophet, Saul's person was sacred to him, and to slay seemed sacrilege. Again, it might be urged that the course taken by David was the course

of prudence, as he might hope thereby to overcome Saul's hostility, and to be restored to favour. Even if these motives had to be recognized, a man possessed by the passion of vindictiveness would not have been restrained by them; and it is best to put the highest construction on his act as Saul is represented as doing. Saul is touched, even to tears, by David's magnanimous conduct, almost without a parallel in that rude age. His native generosity is evoked, and prompts him to a full acknowledgment of the higher moral ideal of David, whom he prays that God may reward.

¶ It is frequently said that our age, in order to be truly better, has need not so much of great talents as of great characters; but where are such exalted characters as that of David, which exhibit the patent of nobility of the true fear of God? Take the one expression, "The Lord forbid it me," out of David's plan of action, and he will do only that which is suggested by his men, who allow themselves to be influenced by no higher power than that of flesh and blood. Can the reason here be concealed, that a magnanimity like this is so very rarely seen? No one becomes really great who has not early learnt to bow deep before God; and none of us will in truth be in a condition to show love towards an irreconcilable enemy but he alone who knows by faith that God first loved him, and out of free grace had mercy on him. Let us then first of all be reconciled to God in Christ, and may His love be then so abundantly poured forth on us by the Holy Ghost, that we may answer hate with love, and even under the greatest temptation think: God cannot possibly will that I should stain myself with sin! Let us then forgive, as those to whom infinitely much has been forgiven; and let us ever more and more seek after a quickened conscience, in order that we may discern with increasing discrimination between the voices of the flesh and those of the spirit.[1]

¶ Dorothy Wyndlow Pattison, known as "Sister Dora," started a small hospital in the town of Walsall. Soon after, "the Murphy riots" took place. One day a boy struck her in the forehead with a stone, cutting it open. Not many weeks afterwards, this lad was terribly injured, and was brought to the hospital. Sister Dora recognized him at once and from that moment cared for him with peculiar tenderness. One day she found him quietly crying, and suddenly he sobbed out, "Sister, I threw that stone at you." "Oh, did you think I did not know

[1] J. J. van Oosterzee, *The Year of Salvation*, ii. 444.

that? Why, I knew you the very first minute you came in at the door." "What!" cried the lad, "you knew me, and have been nursing me like this!"

¶ I have sometimes thought that one reason why his generous faith persisted through the discouragements and chills which came to him as they come to others, was his high disdain of petty grievances. He never wearied and wasted himself in personal disputes. The most magnanimous of men, he had no room for small grudges, envies, and resentments. If he thought himself unjustly treated, he tried to put the thing out of his mind—and he succeeded. He would not discuss the conduct of any one who had wronged him; he thrust it aside, and, if he was compelled to talk of it, he made the best excuse he could for the offender.[1]

I.

Achish.

1. Whatever be the exact details of the meeting between David and Saul at Engedi, and however the two accounts of the flight of David (1 Sam. xxi. 10, xxvii. 1) are to be harmonized, it is clear that David felt himself no longer safe in Judah; and as a last resort he passed over to the national enemy and took refuge with his family and followers at the court of Achish, son of Maoch, king of Gath. His force of six hundred men gave him a weight and rank that would secure a hearty welcome, as a supposed enemy of Saul. Anxious, however, to be out of the way, to avoid compromising himself in any inroads against his own countrymen, he asked and obtained the gift of Ziklag, a distant frontier town on the edge of the desert, 20 miles south-east of Beersheba, and nearly 50 from Gath. There he could be of use in defending Achish from Arab raids and at the same time escape the necessity of attacking his own country. He remained here for a year and four months, as a border chief, busy in forays against the Amalekites and other related tribes of the desert farther south—the old enemies of Israel. Meanwhile, to win the confidence of Achish, he did not scruple to represent his raids as made against different parts of the Negeb settled by Judah, and its hereditary allies, the Kenites; supporting this by

[1] W. Robertson Nicoll, *James Macdonell, Journalist*, 403.

relentlessly killing all the Amalekites and others, of both sexes, who fell into his hands, to prevent news of his duplicity reaching Gath.

¶ David's consistent deception and unrestrained slaughter, even of women and children, only illustrates the low moral standard of the age, and the strange contradictions of human nature. Nor is it to be forgotten that the higher and nobler side of David's nature is the more to be honoured by its contrast with characteristics in which he resembled the men around him. Spiritual development such as his, in an age so rude, crafty, and bloodthirsty, is in itself a miracle of which the only explanation is that he owed it to Divine inspiration.[1]

2. Meanwhile, the Philistines were preparing for a decisive struggle with David's fellow-countrymen, and Achish summoned his vassal to accompany him to the seat of warfare. Fortunately for David the suspicion of the other Philistine chiefs compelled Achish to dismiss his nominal ally. On returning, however, to Ziklag, he found that the city had been assaulted and sacked by the Amalekites, and its inhabitants, including his own wives Ahinoam and Abigail, carried captive. The spirit of mutiny and indignation spread through his men. They probably had been angry with him for leading them to Aphek and then having to turn back, and now in their fury and sorrow, after a wild outbreak of weeping in the manner of Orientals, they proposed to stone their leader. Never did David's strength of character and real religion come out more distinctly. The Bible tells us that he "strengthened himself in the Lord his God." He then inquired of the Lord through the priest, and God directed him to pursue the fugitives. David at once started in pursuit, and, guided by an Egyptian slave whom he found lying half-dead by the wayside, he fell suddenly on the camp of the Amalekites at dusk, and put nearly all of them to the sword. The captives were recovered, together with a great quantity of spoil. Of the captured booty he made a politic use, by sending rich presents to the different towns in Judah which had befriended and sheltered him during his exile. In this way he secured friends whose assistance was soon to be of the highest importance to him.

¶ "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God"; do not overlook this short passage, because it is the only key to the secret

[1] C. Geikie.

of a greatness which otherwise appears almost supernatural. He knows the Lord in the light of His revealed history, and finds this name inscribed in indelible characters on every page of the book of his life. He knows by faith that this God is as truly his as He was the covenant God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. He is conscious of standing in a mutual relation towards this God, which no power, human or superhuman, can break, and now echoes within: "Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him who is the help of my countenance, and my God."

No marvel, truly, that a disposition so exalted in itself should, in circumstances of unparalleled difficulty, possess incalculable dignity. This strength in God, it is evident in the case of David, is the only thing which permanently preserves from despair. It makes us, moreover, like him, with courage and caution, energetic in the deliverance of others. It is finally in God's time and way crowned with the most glorious result. "And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: David recovered all" (1 Sam. xxx. 18, 19). This is then the Amen of God to the prayer of faith: this the crown wreathed by His own hand for the conqueror, who in the hard conflict of life chose Him as Ally. God does not always send deliverance as visibly and marvellously as here; but yet He never is weary of accomplishing His word: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee" (Ps. lxxxiv. 5). Alas, then, why do we, upon whom beams a light so much the brighter, yet stand so far beneath this hero David! He was firm when trouble struck him on the most vulnerable spot: we feel our courage sink even at the bare idea of need and danger. Thus we remain, alas! as long as we yet know not whether the Lord be indeed our God, His love in Christ our inalienable portion. Ah! shall we not rather fully learn to know this to-day than wait until to-morrow, since we know not what a day may bring forth? Only living faith in God makes real heroes like this David, and also like the brave king of Sweden, Gustavus Adolphus, who died on the sixth day of November 1632, but not before he had sung by the flames of Lützen his mighty hymn of faith:

> It is God's cause for which we fight,
> On Him our hope is placed aright;
> Leave all then to the Lord!
> His love in Jesus infinite,
> When it procures us help in need,
> Sends triumph to His word![1]

[1] J. J. van Oosterzee, *The Year of Salvation*, ii. 450.

3. It was only two days after his return to Ziklag that David heard of the defeat of Israel and the death of Saul and his three eldest sons. The messenger who announced it was himself a young Amalekite, who brought Saul's crown and bracelet to David, in the hope of gaining a reward for his tidings. But David with a stern rebuke ordered him to be promptly put to death, for having, by his own admission, slain the Lord's anointed. Then, in a dirge of striking beauty—the "Song of the Bow," as it was afterwards called—David poured forth his generous lament over his kingly foe and his chivalrous friend:

"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!
How are the mighty fallen!
Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

This splendid ode of sorrow reveals to us the unshaken loyalty the deep affectionateness, the poetic power—expressing itself in appropriate words—of the minstrel-king. Does it not do something also to soften our judgment of Saul?

¶ Shall we not lament with David over the shield, cast away on the Gilboa mountains, of him to whom God gave another heart that day, when he turned his back to go from Samuel? (2 Sam. i. 21). It is not our part to look hardly, nor to look always, to the character or the deeds of men, but to accept from all of them, and to hold fast, that which we can prove good, and feel to be ordained for us. We know that whatever good there is in them is itself divine; and wherever we see the virtue of ardent labour and self-surrendering to a single purpose, wherever we find constant reference made to the written scripture of natural beauty, this at least we know is great and good; this we know is not granted by the counsel of God without purpose, nor maintained without result: their interpretation we may accept, into their labour we may enter, but they themselves must look to it, if what they do has no intent f good nor any reference to the Giver of all gifts.[1]

[1] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, ii. (*Works*, iv. 213).

II.

Ishbosheth.

1. The position of Israel at Saul's death was practically just what it had been when he was called to the throne. The domination of the Philistines was more securely established than ever. The Hebrews were scattered and disarmed. Saul had in fact proved himself unequal to the task which circumstances had imposed on him. His fall was thus not an unmixed calamity for his people. What Israel needed at this crisis of her fortunes was not so much a brave and skilful military leader as a ruler capable of appreciating her true mission and function in history.

2. The general feeling of Israel had no doubt singled out David as the future king. But there was little national feeling as yet; tribal interests predominated. At first only David's own tribe of Judah recognized him as king, and in obedience to the Divine oracle he established his little kingdom at Hebron, a city marked out by antiquity and sacred associations with the patriarchs, and, moreover, a naturally strong position. Here he reigned seven and a half years, steadily consolidating his power in the south. It is to be regretted that so little is known of this period of his life. Never could his peculiar abilities have had greater scope for display than in these seven years, during which he rose from being a vassal of Achish to the position of king of Israel and master of Palestine. That the Philistines did not interfere with David's advancement seems to indicate that he had come to some agreement with them, especially as Ziklag remained in his hands. Their consent to his plans naturally presupposed David's assurance that he would be willing to remain their vassal as before. In view of this, two kings in Israel instead of one would be quite welcome to the Philistines. They could hope that each in turn would be held in check by the other. If they overlooked the extraordinary personality of David, they could in fact count on being able to make use of the one to hold within bounds any possible encroachments on the part of the other. But David had ere this defeated many shrewd calculations.

¶ The people to whom Gordon went always discovered what he was. He invariably entered with deepest sympathy into their lives. "I feel strongly," he wrote from Jaffa in 1883, "that the grace God gave me to pray for my enemies in the Soudan led to my success." He made men love him with a great love. During the Taiping Rebellion he drew about him captured Taipings, so that at the last his personal bodyguard was made up of his former enemies. He had a simply magic gift of inspiring confidence, even in the hearts of savages. Mr. Power, the London *Times* correspondent at Khartoum, wrote: "I like Gordon more and more every day; he has a most lovable manner and disposition, and is so kind to me. He is glad if you would show the smallest desire to help him in his great trouble. How one man could have dared to attempt his task I wonder." He handled men with the most daring freedom. He would trust when others would imprison. He would march among hosts of armed foes and manage them as he would. He did not do it by duplicity or diplomacy but by straightforwardness and truth. To dwell further on Gordon's energy, vigour, love of hard tasks, ceaseless activity, patience in duty and restless impatience until duty was done, his thought of detail and his wrath at mere routine and its petty mechanicalism, the thoroughgoing honesty of his work, would be but to draw out the great warm living qualities which we have already felt in the man.[1]

3. Meanwhile Abner, the commander of the Israelitish forces which survived the disaster at Mount Gilboa, had retired to Mahanaim east of the Jordan, and there made Ishbosheth, the surviving son of Saul, king over Gilead, Geshur, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel (2 Sam. ii. 9). For some time the two rival kingdoms were engaged in desultory warfare. A single incident, fraught with momentous consequences, is all that is recorded of the contest. Abner and the men of Ishbosheth went from Mahanaim to the pool of Gibeon, where they met David's men under Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. The two parties remembered that they were both Israelites, and at first shrank from an engagement. By and by, however, Abner proposed that twelve men from each side should engage in a sham fight, for "amusement," and to show their skill in arms. Joab assented, but, owing to the passionate feeling on both sides, the play soon became earnest. The champions fought so desperately that all were slain, and the place was henceforward known as Helkath-hazzurim.

[1] R. E. Speer, *Some Great Leaders in The World Movement*, 288.

This was the signal for a general engagement in which Abner and his men were put to flight. Asahel pursued Abner, but, though able to overtake the veteran warrior, he was no match for him in battle. In vain did Abner beg Asahel to be content with slaying and spoiling a less formidable champion. Asahel persisted in following him and was slain by a thrust of the hinder end of Abner's spear. This, as Abner had foreseen, involved him in a blood-feud with Joab. The pursuit was stayed at last by Abner's appeal to Joab to cease the unnatural strife—not, however, till hundreds of men had been slain.

¶ Asahel was a man of consequence, being brother of the commander of the army and nephew of the king. The death of such a man counted for much, and went far to restore the balance of loss between the two contending armies. It seems to have struck a horror into the hearts of his fellow-soldiers; it was an awful incident of the war. It was strange enough to see one who an hour ago was so young, so fresh and full of life, stretched on the ground a helpless lump of clay; but it was more appalling to remember his relation to the two greatest men of the nation—David and Joab. Certainly war is most indiscriminate in the selection of its victims; commanders and their brothers, kings and their nephews, being as open to its catastrophes as any one else. Surely it must have sent a thrill through Abner to see among the first victims of the strife which he had kindled one whose family stood so high, and whose death would exasperate against him so important a person as his brother Joab.[1]

III.

Abner.

1. The end of Ishbosheth's kingdom, like its beginning, came from Abner. Up to this point Abner had faithfully held to Ishbosheth. Saul's house was also his own. The crown of Benjamin was the pride of his tribe and family. The ambition and lust of power which were united in his character found sufficient food in the prominent position that he had acquired at the side of Ishbosheth. Everything was made dependent on his person and his personal feelings. His king might have reason enough for jealousy and

[1] W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 30.

dissatisfaction; but he would not allow such feelings to appear in the case of one who had become indispensable to him. On one occasion matters culminated in a rather serious outburst. Abner was believed to have taken to himself a concubine of Saul. In accordance with the ideas of the age, this aroused in Ishbosheth serious suspicions of Abner's loyalty. He became afraid that Abner was striving for his throne. With this, Abner's adherence to his cause was at an end. It was probably less fear of Ishbosheth that influenced him than other considerations; for the quarrel could easily have been settled had he so wished. It was rather a welcome occasion, enabling Abner with some show of right to turn to the rising star. For time only served to force even on the northern tribes a clearer perception of the fact that the star of Saul's house was sinking, and that David was the rising star in Israel, to whom the future belonged.

2. There were already many in the north who favoured David's cause; and the number of these was greatly augmented when it became known that Abner had cast his influence into the scale. Abner came to an understanding with the heads of Israel, and particularly with the Benjamites, who might have been inclined to favour Ishbosheth from their tribal connexion with Saul's house. He then brought the conspiracy to a head by making overtures to David. David, however, acted with wise caution. While willing to take advantage of the northern league, he delayed matters for a time, and meanwhile demanded of Ishbosheth that his former wife, Michal, the daughter of Saul, should be publicly restored to him. David made this demand, doubtless, out of wise policy. It must be remembered that David's policy had been to lay claim to the kingdom of Israel as the legitimate successor of Saul. He had executed the Amalekite who boasted of slaying the king on Mount Gilboa, and he had sent publicly to Jabesh-gilead to thank the inhabitants for rescuing the bodies of Saul and Jonathan. In the same spirit he refused to treat with Abner till Saul's daughter Michal had been restored to him. It was evidently the purpose of David to depose Ishbosheth after providing for his maintenance, and to assume the headship over the house of Saul as the husband of Michal. By this means he doubtless hoped to unite all Israel peacefully under his sceptre.

¶ David was too much dissatisfied with Abner's past conduct, and saw too clearly that it was only stress of weather that was driving him into harbour now, to show any great enthusiasm about his offer to make league with him for the undisputed possession of the throne. On the contrary, he laid down a still preliminary condition; and with the air of one who knew his place and his power, he let Abner know that if that condition were not complied with he should not see his face. We cannot but admire the firmness shown in this mode of meeting Abner's advances; but we are somewhat disappointed when we find what the condition was—that Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he had espoused for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, should be restored to him as his wife. The demand was no doubt a righteous one, and it was reasonable that David should be vindicated from the great slur cast on him when his wife was given to another; moreover, it was fitted to test the genuineness of Abner's advances, to show whether he really meant to acknowledge the royal rights of David. But it is not likely that, in this demand for the restoration of Michal, David acted on purely personal considerations. He does not seem to have been above the prevalent feeling of the East which measured the authority and dignity of the monarch by the rank and connections of his wives. Moreover, as David laid stress on the way in which he got Michal as his wife, it is likely that he desired to recall attention to his early exploits against the Philistines. He had probably found that his recent alliance with King Achish had brought him into suspicion; he wished to remind the people therefore of his ancient services against those bitter and implacable enemies of Israel, and to encourage the expectation of similar exploits in the future.[1]

3. The demand was granted—another proof of Ishbosheth weakness, and of Abner's overmastering power in the councils of Mahanaim—and Abner, with twenty others, was appointed to escort Michal to Judah. The embassy served Abner's end: he could now interview David personally, and concert plans of action with him for the reunion of the kingdoms. David received Abner with all honour; and the new league was approaching completion when a tragedy occurred which threatened to bring about a renewal of strife, and to shatter all the hopes of a peaceful union. Joab's bitter spirit of revenge would not consent to any agreement with Abner. As the slayer of his brother Asahel, Abner was necessarily Joab's mortal enemy. And, if Joab knew of Abner's

[1] W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 45.

plans, personal jealousy might also have come into play. Returning from a foray immediately after Abner's departure, he raised a protest, and, not content with this, sent treacherously to recall him, and murdered him in cold blood in the gate of Hebron.

David felt that the murder would give rise to hateful suspicions and cast a shadow on his own reputation. He did what he could to dissociate himself from the treachery of Joab. He gave Abner honourable burial; he fasted and put on sackcloth, and wept over Abner's grave. But, though he cursed Joab in his heart, and openly expressed abhorrence of the deed, he did not call Joab to account—either from weakness or from regard to his great and otherwise faithful services. David was perhaps beginning to find his loyal but unscrupulous nephew too strong for him. David's supreme tact and that marvellous fortune which followed him throughout his career are well illustrated at this crisis, but the real explanation of his ability to escape this seemingly impossible dilemma lies deeper. His upright record and the personal confidence which he had inspired even in his foes alone enabled him to dispel suspicion. His lament over Abner might have been deemed mere hypocrisy, but it was evidently not so regarded by the people of Israel. His frank confession of his own weakness in the hands of Joab and his ruthless kinsmen perhaps also carried great weight before the bar of public opinion. In any case, his prompt repudiation of connivance in Abner's death was generally approved in the north, and the movement in his favour continued.

4. The removal of Abner, however, was a fatal blow to the hopes of Ishbosheth. His hand became feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled. At this juncture two Benjamite officers, Rechab and Baanah, resolved to take a desperate and decisive step. Seizing an opportunity of murdering Ishbosheth during his noonday sleep, they cut off his head and carried it to David, congratulating him on the vengeance which had overtaken his enemy. They little knew their man. David indignantly ordered their summary execution, and buried the head of Ishbosheth in Abner's grave at Hebron. Nor can David's indignation be attributed solely to a politic desire to conciliate Saul's family, his whole conduct on this and similar occasions being marked by an abhorrence of crimes of treachery and violence.

"Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. . . . So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel."

Through perils at the hands of friend and foe, through many crises and temptations, David had passed unscathed. By his reserve and moderation, as well as by his courage and diplomacy, he had at last won the highest honour that his race could confer. Israel had also, in Divine providence, at last found the man supremely fitted to lead it on to the realization of its highest material hopes.

¶ This was a most memorable event in David's history when his throne was at last set up, amid the universal approval of the nation. It was the fulfilment of one great instalment of God's promises to him. It was fitted very greatly to deepen his trust in God, as his Protector and his Friend. To be able to look back on even one case of a Divine promise distinctly fulfilled to us is a great help to faith in all future time. For David to be able to look back on that early period of his life, so crowded with trials and sufferings, perplexities and dangers, and to mark how God had delivered him from every one of them, and, in spite of the fearful opposition that had been raised against him, had at last seated him firmly on the throne, was well fitted to advance the spirit of trust to that place of supremacy which it gained in him. After such an overwhelming experience, it was little wonder that his trust in God became so strong, and his purpose to serve God so intense. The sorrows of death had compassed him, and the pains of Hades had taken hold on him, yet the Lord had been with him, and had most wonderfully delivered him. And in token of his deliverance he makes his vow of continual service, "O Lord, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord."[1]

¶ Nine years had gone since conscience, duty, his country, the cause of civil freedom, the cause of sacred truth and of the divine purpose, had all, as Cromwell believed, summoned him to arms. With miraculous constancy victory had crowned his standards. Unlike Condé, or Turenne, or almost any general that has ever lived, he had in all these years of incessant warfare never suffered

[1] W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 64.

a defeat. The rustic captain of horse was lord-general of the army that he had brought to be the best disciplined force in Europe. It was now to be seen whether the same genius and the same fortune would mark his handling of civil affairs and the ship of state plunging among the breakers. It was certain that he would be as active and indefatigable in peace as he had proved himself in war; that energy would never fail, even if depth of counsel often failed; that strenuous watchfulness would never relax, even though calculations went again and again amiss; that it would still be true of him to the end, that "he was a strong man, and in the deep perils of war, in the high places of the field, hope shone in him like a pillar of fire when it had gone out in all others." A spirit of confident hope, and the halo of past success—these are two of the manifold secrets of a great man's power, and a third is a certain moral unity that impresses him on others as a living whole. Cromwell possessed all three.[1]

There is nothing, I hold, in the way of work
That a human being may not achieve
If he does not falter, or shrink or shirk,
And more than all, if he will *believe.*

Believe in himself and the Power behind
That stands like an aid on a dual ground,
With hope for the spirit and oil for the wound,
Ready to strengthen the arm or mind.

When the motive is right and the will is strong
There are no limits to human power;
For that great force back of us moves along
And takes us with it, in trial's hour.

And whatever the height you yearn to climb,
Tho' it never was trod by the foot of man,
And no matter how steep—I say you *can,*
If you will be patient—and use your time.[2]

[1] Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 346.

[2] Ella Wheeler Wilcox, *Poems of Life*, 16.

DAVID.

V.

THE KING.

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The King.

And David waxed greater and greater; for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.—2 Sam. v. 10.

Seldom indeed has a king reached sovereign power in an important state in the manner in which David attained it. He was not called to be a ruler by hereditary right, and yet he constantly rose in power without entering into any conspiracy or practising any other hostile arts against the reigning dynasty; he was not summoned by a majority of votes to the throne of an avowedly elective monarchy (though no doubt the hereditary descent of the crown was less clearly defined than it is now), and yet he was finally acknowledged, spontaneously, and with enthusiastic love, by the whole people, as the only man worthy of being called to be their ruler; he was not thrown to the surface by the accident of a sudden revolution, and so possibly a mere child of fortune, immature and essentially incompetent: but in the fulness of time, and at the right moment, in perfect vigour of body and mind, he grasped the supremacy which was offered him, after having passed through every outward stage of power and honour, and every inward test of heavy trial and varied strife. But though he was the most worthy of gaining this prize and by far the greatest man of his time, yet both the real facts of the case and his own consciousness combined to warn him that he had reached this lofty position only by his reverence for the Holiness which had, once for all, been embodied in the community of Israel, while Saul, on the other hand, had fallen through despising it; and so he was clearly urged by the striking events of his past life, above all things to seek true welfare hereafter even on the "throne of Israel" in nothing but a faithful clinging to the "rock of Israel" and his "shining light," and thus he might expect a more and more glorious development of the new period of his kingly career. For certainly his accession to the throne could not fail

to be the beginning of fresh labours and struggles, even if of a different kind. The disintegrated and shattered kingdom must be reorganized, a firmer basis of monarchical rule must be laid down, many an ancient error must be atoned for, and many a grievous deficiency made up; and, since the neighbouring peoples would not look quietly upon so independent and mighty an upheaving of the nation, further and constantly extending wars were unavoidable; but all the toils and problems might prove the steps to power and glory which lay in the path before the new monarch. But now that, true to that Holiness, he had reached, by wise and persevering effort, the furthest point of the power and glory which was prepared for him—a point of dizzy height to which no member of the nation had ever climbed before—then at last the question had to be decided whether at this height he would still, as king, seek to be led by the same spirit of Jehovah that had raised him so far, or whether he would forsake that spirit and rely in his pride upon the power which his unprecedented greatness gave him. The way in which David stood this keenest test, a test which could be applied to him alone, determined the issue of his life, and his abiding significance for the history of the future.[1]

In dealing with the first and happiest part of David's life as king over all Israel, it will be convenient to keep his military exploits and his religious policy separate. But these two must both be taken into account before we can understand his career and appreciate his greatness.

I.

David's Military Achievements.

i. The Philistines.

1. In spite of the present arrangement of 2 Sam. v. there can be little doubt that the Philistine wars were the first important events after David's recognition by the whole nation. The first duty of a national leader was to deal with the national enemy. Israel must again be made free, the Philistines must again be

[1] H. Ewald, *The History of Israel*, iii. 120.

driven back to their coast-land. This was what the tribes meant when they asked that David in particular should be their leader. Only thus could David, like Saul, ensure the continuance of the confidence with which the tribes had met him when they anointed him king.

For some years the Philistines had remained inactive. So long as their sovereignty was recognized and the annual tribute paid (probably by both parties), they were quite content to see the Israelites consume one another in a fratricidal conflict. But the present movement for union they regarded in a different light. It was evidently a first step to independence; and they could scarcely doubt that, when David had established his authority over a united kingdom, he would turn his arms against them, and endeavour to put an end to their domination. Saul's crown having passed to David, the relations of the latter to the Philistines, as regards the rights of Israel, were precisely the same as those of Saul had been. Nevertheless David appears to have suffered an attack from the enemy even earlier than he could have expected it. Immediately on learning the news of the anointing of David at Hebron, the Philistines broke into Judah. David was to be surprised, and Israel's attempt to become, through him, once more independent, was to be nipped in the bud. Bethlehem, David's home, was quickly taken possession of, and Hebron threatened. David was promptly informed; but he had not time to call together his forces. He was compelled to withdraw in all haste to the stronghold of Adullam, once so familar to him. Here he seems to have tarried some time, till his forces were assembled. Gradually the people rallied about him, until he was able to meet the Philistines in open battle. In the valley of Rephaim, which led up from the Philistine plain to the west or south-west of Jerusalem, two decisive engagements were fought, and in each case the Hebrews won a sweeping victory. After the final battle they drove the Philistines out upon the western plain, as far as the Canaanite city of Gezer. Following up his victories, David destroyed the Philistine supremacy, taking from them, as is said, "the bridle of the mother city."

2. The importance of these victories must have been far greater than the scanty notices of them would at first suggest. The story

lies before us only in fragmentary narratives. This lack of information is the more disappointing as the war with Philistia was the most important as well as the most decisive of those waged by David. For several generations the Philistines had been the most dangerous of Israel's foes. In vain had Samson, Samuel, and Saul striven to deliver their countrymen from the oppressive yoke of the uncircumcised. It weighed on the nation till David became king; nor was the severity of the Philistine tyranny ever forgotten. But after David's reign the hated oppressors are hardly mentioned, and were never really formidable. It is possible that when David became assured of his position as king of Israel he not only conquered, but conciliated, the Philistines. It must be remembered that he had been their ally, had fought in their army, and had long lived in intimate alliance with them; and as in later days Philistines are found holding high positions in his court and army, the nation may have felt but little shame in becoming his allies, or even in partially acknowledging his suzerainty.

3. It is possible that some of the stories told of David's mighty men should be referred to a later period: but one story that has been inserted in the appended chapters of 2 Sam. is clearly referable to this time. On one occasion David was reconnoitring near Bethlehem, where the Philistine garrison was posted; some of the enemy's troops were standing on the alert outside the gate. He felt parched with thirst. It was the time of harvest and of the summer heats, when the torrents were dried up and water was scarce. David remembered the time when, as a shepherd lad tending his father's flocks, he had refreshed himself in the hot summer days by taking long deep draughts at the well by the gate of Bethlehem. The memory of those early days led him to thirst and sigh after the Bethlehem waters, even to audible soliloquy. An almost incredible self-sacrificing love crept over David's three captains, called "the three mightiest." They started off without his knowledge, forced a passage through the Philistine lines, and brought him the water. David, however, refused to allow men to hazard their lives merely for his personal gratification, and poured out the water "before Jehovah."

(1) This gift of water was *associated with memories of early days.* As David sat there and looked upon Bethlehem's plains in

the distance, a flood of memories came back to him of bygone days when he had been happy and light of heart as a shepherd boy. It is wonderful how little sometimes will bring back old times to those who have wandered far, in time or place, from the scenes of childhood's years. One writer quotes the following as favourite lines of his:—

Four ducks on a pond,
A grass bank beyond,
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing.
What a little thing
To remember for years,
To remember with tears!

¶ If you have never been home-sick you cannot understand this story. If in your strong manhood you have not felt that for five minutes you would like to be a child again, and wander, free from manhood's cares, where once your childish footsteps strayed, this Hebrew story will remain Hebrew to you. It has been my happy fortune to look upon some of the fairest scenes on earth, in the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Alleghanies, the Rockies, by Rhine, Danube, Meuse, and Mississippi, in the great Cañons of Colorado, and on the placid lakes which sleep eternally beneath the fathomless blue of Italian skies. And sometimes, amid the boundless prodigality of Nature's loveliness, I have found myself hungering for the fields and lanes of childhood and the days of long ago. On the Gorner Grat, in the Cirque de Gavarnie, on Lake Como, I could close my eyes and see the castle on the Rock which Lucy Hutchinson held for Cromwell against Charles, the Forest where Robin Hood and Little John sported with Maid Marian in the shade, the grove and churchyard where Kirke White aspired and dreamed, the hills, bleak and barren, where Byron's storm-tossed youth was passed—and I have wanted to gather crocuses again by the banks of the peaceful Trent! I have little doubt that if I went I should find the Forest destitute of trees, cut up into neat plots described as "this elegible building land," the bleak hills slightly more barren because dotted with coal-pits and loaded with slag, and the meadows where the crocus grew a wilderness of bricks and mortar. There is no well of water beside what once were the gates and walls of my native town, from which I long to drink. The farm-house where I used to buy—or generally beg—a drink of milk, is now a goods station or a railway siding. But all the same, oh, just the same! I know exactly how David felt

when he longed for a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem. I know—but I cannot tell you. And if I could, you would not be any wiser, for all of you who have once been home-sick know perfectly already.[1]

(2) This gift of water would always be *associated in David's mind with the love that brought it.* Dear as were the thoughts of early days, David prized very highly, too, the affection that led these three men to run such risks to gratify the wish of their beloved leader. What a splendid gift it was! Only a drink of water, but it was turned, as it were, into sacramental wine by the love that brought it.

¶ When David took the water from the well of Bethlehem, which three of his finest soldiers had risked their lives to obtain, and, without even tasting it, poured it out unto the Lord, he performed one of those sublimely sacramental deeds that the world has never been able to understand, and that even the Church itself has too often misinterpreted. Viewed superficially, the act was open to so much adverse criticism. Some would say it was the act of a sentimental man—something unworthy a soldier and a man of affairs in the thick of a strenuous campaign. Some might even suggest that it was ungrateful—a poor use to which to put so costly an offering. Some might find a savour of paganism in that votive libation. David looked at the water, and lo! it was blood-red in his eyes. "This is not water. This is the life's blood of three of my bravest. This is the chalice of that love that can look with a smile into the face of death. This is the sacrifice of three brave souls. I am not worthy to drink of this cup. I, who have been selfish and unfaithful, have no right to touch this offering—this sacrament of unselfishness and fidelity. I can but offer it to the God of all beautiful and deathless things."

As David saw, in that simple drink of water, the sacrament of a love of which he dared not count himself worthy, so must we come to see that all the best things in life, simple though many of them be, are too good for us. We are not fit to hold them in our hands, saving as an offering unto the Lord. The tender love and ungrudging devotion of our parents, the loyal, unselfish service of our friends, our share in the loveliness and wisdom of the years, the draughts of joy and hope and fulfilment that are held out to us, how do we receive these things? As commonplaces, as obvious rights. Oh, that we could see the red, red stains of the heart's sacrifice on all these things! Would that we

[1] C. F. Aked, *Old Events and Modern Meanings*, 45.

could find the sacramental meaning of all that has ever been done for us for love's sake—the daring and the drudgery alike![1]

(3) David felt that he must *associate this gift in a special way with God.* It was one of the finest things he had ever had done to him in his life. Men's lives had been in jeopardy to get it. It was too rich an offering to make use of only for his own gratification, and he poured it out unto the Lord. David wanted to associate God in a special way with the best things in his life. He did not give God merely what was worthless to himself.

¶ "Let that which is lost be for God," says the proverb. And the story of its origin is to the effect that an old man, when dying, was disposing of his goods. One of his cows had strayed, and his decision was that, if it was found, it should be given to such-an-one of his children, but, if it was not found, then let it be for God. It was not so with David. He did not give his God merely what was lost or worthless, but rather the best he had.[2]

4. There are sacrifices which we have no right to accept from others. The three had no right to risk life for such a purpose, and David would have been selfish if he had drunk the water. Do not such thoughts lead us by contrast to Him who has done what none other can do? "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give his life a ransom for him"; but Jesus can and Jesus does. What it would be impossible, and wrong if it were possible, for one man to do for another, Jesus has done for us all; and what it would be base for a man to accept from another if that other could give it, it is blessed and the beginning of all nobleness of character for us to accept from Him. David would not drink because the cup seemed to him to be red with blood. Jesus offers to us a cup, not of cold water only, but of "water and blood," and bids us drink of it and remember Him.

¶ I have now come to the point where I must go to humanity's purest teacher. We shall take our stand by the Son of Man, the human Christ, as He sits weary on the well of Samaria. Try for one moment to do this in reality. Here is Jesus treading life's dusty pathway, feeling as you and I often feel, knowing, as you and I know, life with its trials, disappointments, sorrows, failures, its beginnings again; living through it all, never defeated by it.

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *A Thornless World*, 213.

[2] J. S. Maver, *The Children's Pace*, 95.

Here sits Jesus weary with the greatness of the way, like ourselves, wanting human sympathy, and, as we so often are, refused. "Give me to drink," pleads the Son of Man; and the answer is dislike, prejudice, ignorance. Then the Divine remonstrance comes, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But it shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto eternal life."[1]

ii. The Taking of Jerusalem.

1. David's victories over the Philistines freed the nation from external oppression; the next task was to weld it into one whole. David was a born ruler. He knew that religion and national life needed a centre, unity a point of support, national strength a rallying place—in short, that the land, if it was to maintain its unity and freedom, needed a capital that would be worthy of the monarchy and would guarantee its stability. Hebron lay too far south to be a suitable centre of government, and, moreover, the capital of an empire in those days required to be the most defensible city in the bounds. The finest natural fortress in the land was the rock of Zion, or Jebus, and it was also just on the boundary-line between Judah and the northern half of the kingdom. It was still held by a Canaanite tribe called, from its name, Jebusites, who had kept up some sort of independence. David had set his heart on this town as his capital, and marched against it with an army. So confident were the Jebusites of the unassailable strength of their fortress that, when David threw his whole forces against it, they jeered at him, and said that even the blind and the lame could defend it. For the taking of it, David offered the highest prize in his kingdom. He gave his royal word that whoever first scaled the tremendous cliff and walls should be commander-in-chief. His nephew, Joab, with all the agility of his race, did the deed, flung the enemy down, and led the way, and the place was carried. The inhabitants were spared, and new settlers were introduced from Judah and Benjamin. The city was newly fortified, and a palace was built for the king on the western slope of Mount Zion.

[1] R. J. Campbell, *Sermons addressed to Individuals*, 200.

2. The "city of David," thus refounded, was in every respect the most suitable capital for the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The position of Jerusalem, on or even within the borders of both Benjamin and Judah, served to bind together the two royal families and the two most powerful tribes; from its strong situation it derived important military advantages, while its high elevation and its seclusion, alike from the sea and from the great thoroughfares of commerce, fitted the city in a peculiar manner for its future function as the spiritual metropolis of the world. The very mixture of population which was a feature of the new city was a symbol and visible token of that unification of races and interests in Palestine which it was the work of David's reign to effect. The capture of Zion is the turning-point in the national history. With it a new era begins. The days of primitive Israel ended when the last Canaanite stronghold fell into the hands of David.

¶ The topography of ancient Jerusalem has many difficulties. The indications of the Bible favour the view that the citadel of the Jebusites which became Mount Zion, the city of David, was situated on the eastern hill, south of the later temple-area. It remains uncertain whether the western hill was also inhabited by the Jebusites; but we may well believe in any case that the new influx of Israelites would soon render the extension necessary.[1]

¶ One of the two cardinal questions of the topography of Jerusalem is that of the position of Sion, the Jebusite fortress which David captured, and which was called thereafter *The City of David*, or (more properly translated) *David's-Burgh*. To this question there are two possible answers. *First*, till a few years ago it was the general opinion, received by tradition from the time of Josephus, that the South-west Hill, the most massive and dominant of the heights of Jerusalem, was not only an integral part of the city from before the days of David, but contained also the citadel of political and military power under the kings of Judah. This traditional view is expressed in the present nomenclature of the South-west Hill. The Tomb of David is believed to lie there, and there is placed the site of the Palace of Solomon, from which a bridge or raised causeway across the central valley is supposed to have served for the passage of the king when he *went up* to the Temple. The southern gate of the present City opening on the Hill is called Bab en-Neby Daûd, "Gate of the

[1] J. D. Fleming.

Prophet David," or Bab Sahyun, "Sion-Gate." The Citadel-tower is known as "David's Tower," and the Hill, as a whole, is called by Christians "Mount Sion." *Second,* the opposite view is that Sion, and by consequence the "City of David," lay on the East Hill on the part called Ophel, just above the Virgin's Spring; that Mount Sion came to be the equivalent in the Old Testament of the Temple Mount; that the location of the "City of David" by the present Jaffa gate was due to an error by Josephus, and that there is no trace of the name Sion being applied to the South-west Hill till we come some way down the line of Christian tradition. The supporters of this second view are divided as to when the South-west Hill was brought within the City; some think in Jebusite times, some by David, some by Solomon, some by the eighth-century kings, and some not till the Greek or Maccabean period.[1]

iii. Foreign Wars.

We now turn to the foreign policy of the new-made king. Having delivered Israel from all fear of the Philistines he proceeded to "recover" lands which the tribes had originally (or ideally) held across the Jordan.

1. The cause of the war with *Moab* is quite unknown, but there must have been a change in its policy since the time when David had placed his parents under the protection of the king of Moab. Neither is anything recorded as to the war, save that it was completely successful, and that the prisoners of war were treated with great severity. Two-thirds of them were put to death, and the remainder became tributary vassals of Israel, and so continued till the reign of Ahaziah, when they again recovered their freedom under Mesha.

2. The fear of David's prowess did not prevent the fierce *Ammonites* from deliberately provoking a war with him. David sent a peaceful embassy to Hanun, the new king, whose father Nahash had shown David kindness (perhaps during his wanderings). But Hanun, influenced by his princes, who suspected David's intention, rejected the embassy, and sent away the ambassadors with gross insults, mutilating their beards, and cutting short their robes—deadly affronts to an Oriental. David prepared to cross the Jordan, and the Ammonites made a league

[1] G. A. Smith, *Jerusalem from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70*, i. 134.

with the neighbouring kings of Syria. A large army was sent to assist the Ammonites by Hadadezer, the Syrian king of Zobah, and his allies, but it was defeated outside the walls of Rabbah by Joab and Abishai. David then invaded Syria in person and routed the army of Hadadezer so completely that the Ammonites had no more hope of support from Syria. After this Rabbath-Ammon was invested by the Israelites; and, when its fall was inevitable, Joab sent for David that he might take the city himself, "lest," said Joab, "I take the city, and it be called by my name." According to the present reading, the Ammonites were treated by David with savage cruelty, but a very slight modification of the text will justify the hope that the prisoners were spared and put to work at the royal buildings. That David put the Ammonites to death with barbarous torture is not historically credible; for even if David was capable of such cruelty (compare his treatment of the Moabites), he was afterwards served loyally by some of the Ammonites.

3. The last of David's foreign conquests was that of *Edom*, but we have only a few disconnected allusions to the war. It appears that David gained a great victory in the Valley of Salt after his Syrian campaign (2 Sam. viii. 13 f., LXX; 1 Ch. xviii. 11 f.; Ps. lx., title). By this conquest he obtained command of the ports on the Red Sea. Prefects were appointed throughout the country, and for six months Joab remained in Edom, to destroy the male population.

Thus David was invariably successful in his wars, and extended his kingdom in every direction. The Philistines in the west were thoroughly subdued; across the Jordan, Ammon and Moab were made tributary; and, while the Syrians in the north acknowledged his power, his kingdom was extended southward as far as the Red Sea and the borders of Egypt. The growing kingdom advanced to the zenith of its power, and a new era of national prosperity began. David had gathered great spoil in these wars, and annual tribute poured into his treasury. Israel increased in numbers and in prosperity, and with the growing resources of the State the authority of the king was not only assured, but greatly enlarged.

¶ An incident of this military period (thrust into an appendix [ch. xxiv.], and possibly a late insertion) came about through the

king's desire for a census of the people fit to bear arms. This desire offended the free Hebrews, and even the general himself, Joab, remonstrated. Still he executed his orders—but slowly, occupying nine months over the business, which took him as far north as Tyre. Judah was counted separately, and (according to Chronicles) Levi and Benjamin exempted. The numbers reported are extraordinarily large—800,000 in Israel and 500,000 in Judah; but the interest of the thing lies in the sequel. A pestilence followed, expressive, according to David's conscience, of the displeasure of God at his royal presumption and folly. Seventy thousand innocent persons perished in the country, but before the plague reached Jerusalem, Jehovah "repented him of the evil," and stayed the hand of the destroying angel. The scene of this deliverance was a threshing-floor belonging to a native proprietor on the highest point of Mount Zion; an altar rose upon the spot as a memorial of mercy; this gradually attracted to itself the tribal devotions formerly paid either at Hebron or at Mizpah, till it became the High Place at Jerusalem, ready for a royal architect to adorn it with buildings.

II.

David's Religious Policy.

i. The Ark.

1. The conquest of Jerusalem by David, and the designation of that city as capital of the land, had a still deeper significance. A royal seat and capital must necessarily possess also a royal sanctuary. Religion in Israel was a national affair. No event which touched the nation could dispense with it. If the national capital, the focus of the life of the people, was to answer its purpose, it must be the centre likewise of the religious life of the people. It is an additional proof of the greatness of David that he perceived this. He perceived that the spirit of his people and its vocation demanded a close connexion between national life and religious life. He had an eye for the secret inner nature of his nation, which pointed it out as the people of religion, the people of God. He resolved to make the civil capital of the country its religious capital too, by transferring to Jerusalem the ark of the covenant, which was at this time apparently the most revered relic of the Mosaic tabernacle. This ancient emblem of the

Divine presence belonged to no one tribe: it was the palladium of the nation, the symbol of its past unity, and the pledge of its future continuance as a united religious people. For a considerable time, however, this symbol of the national faith had lain neglected and forgotten at Kiriath-jearim, where it had been brought after the Philistines had sent it home from its captivity.

2. An undertaking of such solemn national importance as the transference of the ark to Jerusalem must be that of the whole people, and not of David alone. Accordingly, representatives from the whole land assembled to the number of thirty thousand and proceeded to Kiriath-jearim. The most approved method of conveying the ark from place to place seems at that time to have been to place it on a new cart, never used for any common or profane service, and drawn by oxen. This was the plan that David adopted. The two sons of Abinadab, Uzzah and Ahio, drove the cart, and the whole company sang and played before the ark with the greatest heartiness. But when the procession came to a threshing-floor outside the town the cart shook from the roughness of the road, and Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark, not thinking of the sanctity of the symbol of God's presence, and in an instant he fell dead on the spot.

David was so shocked and terrified by this mark of the Divine displeasure that he was afraid to carry out his purpose. He caused the ark to be conveyed to the house of Obed-edom, a Philistine of Gath, who loyally accepted the charge. Three months later, on learning that Obed-edom's household was blessed by the presence of the sacred shrine, David recovered from his fear, and resolved to carry out his first intention. This time the ark was borne on the shoulders of the priests, and sacrifices were offered as the procession started. The hill of Zion was ascended with triumphal dance and song, David himself taking the lead, and by the exuberance of his zeal earning the contempt and reproach of his wife Michal. The ark was deposited in the tent prepared for it near the royal residence on Zion; and the ceremony was concluded with sacrifices and burnt-offerings and peace-offerings and the distribution of largess to the people. Zadok and Abiathar were appointed as chief priests in charge of the ark and of the sacrificial service in Jerusalem.

¶ There are three sorts of people to whom David dancing before the ark is an offence. First, there are those whose lips are ever quick to curl, whose countenance is ever prompt to sneer, whose tongues are ever ready with a jest profane when *the service of God* crosses their path. I only say to you beware lest that come upon you—"As he loved cursing, so let it come upon him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him." Secondly, there are those who up to a certain point favour the worship of God and the services of the church. But there comes a season of extraordinary service, a revival that demands uncommon energy; and almost before they are themselves aware of it, the repugnance of their hearts finds some strong and unkindly expression. Now let me point you to Saul's daughter, and remind you how in one hour she proved her pedigree, identified herself with a family which the Lord had rejected, and sealed her own irrevocable doom. Then, thirdly, there is the professor of religion, who with David's trial is wanting in David's constancy. Have I sown the seed of gospel truth broadcast among you so often and hath none fallen in stony places? You may have heard the word, and anon with joy received it; and you may have "dured awhile, though you have no root in yourselves." But let me ask you, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, are you offended? does it prove a stumbling-block to you? If so, your case is deplorable. Do you parry off the first breath of ridicule with flippant tongue? Did I hear that you said the other day, "Oh, I don't profess anything; I only just go in to that chapel now and then to hear the preacher; he rather takes my fancy." Ah! young man, let your conscience witness that you are shrinking back unworthily. You may only dissemble a little at first, but if you are coward enough to dissemble, you may ere long prove infidel enough to apostatize. Brethren and sisters in the Lord, "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, in nothing terrified by your adversaries." "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in his name, but also to suffer for his sake."[1]

¶ The remarkable point, on which we cannot dwell too much, is the combination in David of the temper and action of Prophet, Priest, and King. His supremacy in war, his administrative ability, his personal influence over the whole people, find their reason and ground in his response to the call of God, his trust in God, and his profoundly religious character. To the whole nation the establishment of the throne at Jerusalem in such a way and under such a man gave a new feeling of strength and

[1] C. H. Spurgeon.

power and of their position as the people of God; and so he became the great symbol of the future Messiah, as they became the great symbol of the Kingdom of Christ.[1]

ii. The Temple.

1. The ark of God had thus found a temporary resting-place on Mount Zion, but David was not content himself to dwell in a house of cedar while the ark dwelt within curtains. He proposed to Nathan the prophet, his chief religious adviser, that a permanent house of God, or temple, should be built. Nathan at first encouraged this pious desire; but a Divine revelation or "vision" bade him take the king a very different answer. Jehovah had dwelt hitherto in a tent, and wished for no other abode. The keen spiritual insight of the prophet doubtless foresaw the injurious results likely to follow the introduction of a splendid temple service, diverting the popular mind from the essential to the outward and ritual. The time indeed was hardly ripe for the centralization of worship at a single fixed sanctuary

2. The king's disappointment was very keen, but it was softened by Nathan's announcement that though he could not build a house for God, God would build a house for him, that is, by a play on the word, would establish the throne to his descendants. Moreover, if he sinned, he would not be rejected as Saul had been, but would be chastened in love and tenderness. This message is followed in our account by a beautiful prayer, in which David thanks God for all His goodness to himself and his people.

¶ According to the account of Chronicles (1 Chron. xxii. 8, xxviii. 3), David was not permitted to build the temple because he was a man of war, and had shed much blood. But the most natural and entirely sufficient reason is that given by Solomon later (1 Kings v. 3), that David his father was not able to build a house to the Lord, because of the many wars he had to wage on every side. In other words, David had not sufficient leisure, and possibly he had not sufficient material in money and skill and command of labour to build a temple worthy of Jehovah, or adequate to his own ideal. What he could do he did: he consecrated to the treasury of Jehovah a great part of the silver and gold acquired in war, and so made it possible for his successor to carry through the work successfully.[2]

[1] W. J. Knox Little. [2] J. D. Fleming, *Israel's Golden Age*, 95.

¶ It must appear in the highest degree surprising that David built no temple for the ark; when he had brought it into his capital and to his palace, the idea must have occurred to him of erecting there a worthy abode for Jehovah. As he did not do so, he must have been influenced by special reasons and considerations. If, moreover, it is true, as the history of Samuel suggests, that the ark had already had a proper temple at Shiloh, we need have no hesitation in affirming that nothing short of a Divine oracle could have withheld David from building a real temple. Without such a definite declaration of Jehovah's will, it would have been culpable indifference, and sacrilegious contempt for the majesty of Jehovah, had David built no temple. There is therefore, in point of fact, no ground for calling in question as a later invention the intention of David, obviously attributed to him by the tradition, to build on Zion a temple to Jehovah, and its abandonment in obedience to a prophetic oracle. The somewhat late origin of the passage in question cannot invalidate such overpowering internal evidence as there is in favour of the fact.[1]

¶ None of us are privileged to perform completed tasks. "One soweth and another reapeth." We have to be content to do partial work, and to leave its completion to our successors. There is but one Builder of whom it can be said that His hands "have laid the foundation of this house; His hands shall also finish it." He who is the "Alpha and Omega," and He alone, begins and completes the work in which He has neither sharers nor predecessors nor successors. The rest of us do our little bit of the great work which lasts on through the ages, and, having inherited unfinished tasks, transmit them to those who come after us. It is privilege enough for any Christian to lay foundations on which coming days may build. We are like the workers on some great cathedral, which was begun long before the present generations of masons were born, and will not be finished until long after they have dropped trowel and mallet from their dead hands. Enough for us if we can lay one course of stones in that great structure. The greater our aims, the less share has each man in their attainment. But the division of labour is the multiplication of joy, and all who have shared in the toil will be united in the final triumph. It would be poor work that was capable of being begun and perfected in a lifetime. The labourer that dug and levelled the track and the engineer that drives the locomotive over it are partners. Solomon could not have built the Temple unless, through long, apparently idle, years, David had been patiently gathering together the wealth which he bequeathed.

[1] R. Kittel, *A History of the Hebrews*, ii. 159.

So, if our work is but preparatory for that of those who come after, let us not think it of slight importance, and let us be sure that all who have had any portion in the toil shall share in the victory, that "he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."[1]

[1] A. Maclaren.

DAVID.

VI.

Decline and Fall.

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Decline and Fall.

Thou art the man.—2 Sam. xii. 7.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.—2 Sam. xii. 13.

The remaining history of David is one long tissue of faults and their consequences, illustrating that part of the dynastic promise, as conveyed by Nathan, which said: "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men." A mere historian would have dismissed David's domestic experiences with a sentence or two. The author of the parallel history of Chronicles entirely ignores this side of David's character and reign. It was only the prophetic historian who had the courage and desire to present in their hideous realism David's odious crimes and their consequences. These stories constitute the major part of the book of 2 Samuel (chaps. ix.–xx.). In a vivid, detailed narrative they present the pathetic tragedy of David's closing years. The problems there treated are of universal and vital significance. Their importance amply justifies the frankness with which they are presented. The dark background of these stories is an Oriental court, with its degrading institution of polygamy. Before he became king of united Israel, David had married seven wives. Later, still others were added to his harem. The subsequent history shows that his household was by no means free from the usual vices which flourish in an eastern harem: luxury, the pursuit of pleasure, petty jealousies, and intrigues. The king, therefore, lived in an atmosphere in which it was almost impossible to develop strong moral fibre.

I.

David's Sin.

1. During the Ammonite war, David remained at home in Jerusalem instead of going out with his army to Rabbah, and there the king of Israel cast his lustful eyes upon another man's

wife—Bathsheba, the beautiful wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of the captains with Joab's army. In his unscrupulousness he planned the destruction of him who stood between his lust and its gratification. Uriah must be got out of the way; and in a very base and wicked fashion the deed was done. Uriah was placed in the front of the fighting line, and died with his face to the foe. The irony of the situation is that he died as an Israelitish soldier fighting for his country, and not improbably with the name of his king upon his lips and enthusiasm for David in his heart, charging the foe for the man who was his murderer. Doubtless, David covered up the fact, which Uriah himself never knew, by saying to himself, "This man died a worthy death—why not he as well as any other soldier? I did not slay him, the enemy slew him. In all probability he would not have chosen another death if he were a true soldier and patriot. I am not guilty; therefore now what more natural than that I without reproach should take unto me Uriah's wife?"

2. Many of those who surrounded David's throne might have viewed the double crime as an unfortunate incident of the harem, a private slip of little account in a career otherwise unsullied and glorious. To Nathan, the prophet and friend of David, it was much more. To him it was a black sin, revealing more of the real David than a hundred victories, and tarnishing all the glory of his former achievements. While David was hugging the assurance that his dark deeds were unknown, or that in any case no one would dare to charge him with them, Nathan was ushered into his presence. He had a tale of injustice to bring to the king's notice —a tale of a poor man's lamb, which his rich neighbour had seized by violence. It was a case requiring restitution and justice from a king who bore not the sword in vain. Nobly did the king respond to the call: he solemnly swore that the mean aggressor should die, and restore the lamb fourfold. David was quite unprepared for the conscience-thrust that followed: "Thou art the man." As Nathan put before him the enormity of his sin, his black ingratitude to God, and his base murder of Uriah, and declared that he had pronounced his own judgment, David quailed. He sincerely confessed his sin. Nathan thereupon announced to him that, while his sin was forgiven, the punishment could not be

wholly averted; he must still reap as he had sown. For the sin a man commits will plague him and others long after it has been confessed and pardoned; the natural consequences remain unaltered, and other punishments may be needed to clear away the moral stain.

¶ Dr. John Brown, author of *Rab and His Friends*, gives a vivid picture of his father's preaching on David's sin and its consequences:

I am in Rose Street on the monthly lecture, the church crammed, passages and pulpit stairs. Exact to a minute, James Chalmers—the old soldier and beadle, slim, meek—appears, and all the people in that long pew rise up, and he, followed by his minister, erect and engrossed, walks in along the seat, and they struggle up to the pulpit. We all know what he is to speak of; he looks troubled even to distress;—it is the matter of Uriah the Hittite. He gives out the opening verses of the 51st Psalm, and offering up a short and abrupt prayer, which every one takes to himself, announces his miserable and dreadful subject, *fencing* it, as it were, in a low, penetrating voice daring any one of us to think an evil thought; there was little need at that time of the warning—he infused his own intense, pure spirit into us all. He then told the story without note or comment, only personating each actor in the tragedy with extraordinary effect, above all, the manly, loyal, simple-hearted soldier. I can recall the shudder of that multitude as of one man when he read, "And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." And then, after a long and utter silence, his exclaiming, "Is this the man according to God's own heart? Yes, it is; we must believe that both are true." Then came Nathan. "There were two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb"—and all that exquisite, that Divine fable—ending, like a thunder-clap, with, "Thou art the man!" Then came the retribution, so awfully exact and thorough—the misery of the child's death; the brief tragedy of the brother and sister, more terrible than anything in Æschylus, in Dante, or in Ford; then the rebellion of Absalom, with its hideous dishonour, and his death, and the king covering his face, and crying in a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom! my son! my son!"—and David's psalm, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according

unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions,"—then closing with, "Yes; 'when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err,' do not stray, do not transgress (μὴ πλανᾶσθε), 'my beloved brethren,' it is first 'earthly, then sensual, then devilish';" he shut the book, and sent us all away terrified, shaken, and humbled, like himself.[1]

3. The story shows us David at his worst; lower, it seems to us, he could not fall. But he bent before the prophet's rod; humbled himself with a broken contrite heart; took his punishment submissively. Slow and sad was his recovery; penal suffering dogged his steps henceforth; the wheels of his life dragged heavily; but the regeneration, the ascent, the exodus, was sure and faithful; the battered corrupted life regained, as it closed, the proud title of its maturity; he lives ever in the sacred page as "the man after God's own heart."

¶ "This is the man after God's own heart!" people sneer. Yes! Not because saints have a peculiar morality, and atone for adultery and murder by making or singing psalms, but because, having fallen into foul sin, he learned to abhor it, and with many tears, with unconquerable resolution, with deepened trust in God, set his face once more to press toward the mark. That is a lesson worth learning.[2]

¶ We must think of David henceforth as a weak man slowly regaining moral health and purity: battling painfully with the evil of his heart and private life; and learning by the calamities that fell upon him, blow after blow, to throw himself more unreservedly upon God, and to arrogate less power to the might of his own arm. Whether David wrote the 51st Psalm or not, the sentiments there expressed have their roots in such an experience as his, and indicate the cries of a true heart, under the Divine discipline: "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."[3]

4. Sin may be forgiven, as David's was, and yet a long train of sad consequences ensue. The law of cause and effect will follow on, with its linked chain of disaster; though God's mercy to His

[1] Dr. John Brown, *Horæ Subsecivæ*, ii. 94.
[2] A. Maclaren.
[3] J. D. Fleming, *Israel's Golden Age*, 103.

erring and repentant children will be shown, in converting the results of their sin into the fires of their purification; in setting alleviation of the tenderest sort against their afflictions; and in finally staying the further outworking of evil. All these facts stand out upon the pages which tell the story of God's chastisements, alleviations, and deliverances.

David's immediate penance was terribly severe. With his warm fatherly heart, he loved Bathsheba's son with deep affection. The child, however, sickened to death. David at once recognized in the event the beginning of his punishment. He refused all food, lay on the ground all night, and prayed to God for mercy. When his nearest relatives came and tried to comfort him, he would not be moved. For six days this went on, and on the seventh day the child died. His servants were now afraid to tell him of his death, dreading a yet wilder outburst of grief. But he soon read the truth in their altered behaviour, and bade them tell him whether the child was dead or not. They answered that he was. Then, to their astonishment, David at once arose, removed all traces of his mourning instead of redoubling them, and, after worshipping God, took food again. When they questioned him as to this strange procedure, he explained that his prayers and mourning were intended to move God to spare the life of the child, but now it was beyond recall, and he must submit. He would go to his child in the other world, some day; his son would never come back to him.

II.

Absalom's Rebellion.

1. Two years after, one of his sons treated his sister as David had treated Uriah's wife.

Amnon, his oldest son, was one of the pitiable products of the Oriental harem. He was ruled by the same ungovernable passions as overmastered his kingly father. An unprincipled friend was at hand to advise him how he could gratify his mad passion. Even David himself was made an agent in the ghastly tragedy. The hideous wrong to the victim of Amnon's lust is brought out with a frankness and realism that everywhere characterize the teaching

of those early champions of righteousness, the Hebrew prophets. Amnon's brutality, even after the lapse of centuries, arouses the hot indignation of the reader, and to some extent undoubtedly excuses his subsequent murder by his brother Absalom.

2. From henceforward the court of David became the scene of constant intrigues, of plots and counterplots. Amnon is dead, and Absalom is in exile. His great misfortunes seem to have wholly unnerved the king: he mourns over his absent son and heir every day, but he will neither punish him nor pardon him. After three years Joab has the wit to stir his lethargy by a story put into the mouth of a "wise woman of Tekoa," who pretends that a family blood-feud, carried to its bitter end, is about to "quench my coal which is left." The interpretation follows. David will leave the nation desolate unless he "doth fetch home again his banished one." Thus entreated, the king recalls Absalom indeed, but will not see his face; only after two full years in Jerusalem does he, through Joab's reluctant intervention, obtain an interview and a father's kiss. It is not wonderful that the five years' estrangement should have worked on Absalom's character for the worse. Handsome, strong, and doubtless pitied by the people—who would have justified Amnon's murder by David's neglect—Absalom deliberately set himself to win their favour.

3. David's sin, and the various acts of consequent weakness, had lost him something of his old influence over the people. There was one part of his conduct in particular which may have awakened the suspicion and ill-will of the northern tribes—his treatment of the remaining members of Saul's household. How far David was actuated by political motives in the matter it is impossible to say; but it is only too probable that those who were ready to suspect the king of cunning and cruelty would have their suspicions confirmed. His treatment of the lame Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, whom he kept at his court, and to whom he restored the lands and possessions of Saul, might be construed by the envious as an act of jealous precaution rather than of real generosity. His conduct to the other members of Saul's family might well raise darker suspicions. On the occasion of a famine caused by three years' bad harvests, the oracle

declared that God was angry on account of Saul's cruel repression of the Canaanites of Gibeon. By way of propitiation, David handed over seven of Saul's family to the Gibeonites, who offered them as a bloody sacrifice to Jehovah. The horrid tale of superstition is somewhat relieved by the story of Rizpah, the mother of two of the victims, who watched day and night for weeks over the bodies, driving off the birds and beasts of prey, till David at last was constrained to give them honourable burial. Although David probably acted in this matter from motives of stern religious conviction, the fact of such a slaughter of Saul's sons could scarcely fail to tell heavily against him, and tend to keep alive the lingering discontent in the north, where the name of Saul was still revered.

¶ It has always been the hardest task which theology has had to face, to be rid of the idea that God, sharing our vengeful passions, delights in the death of a man as a man in his savage state delights in the death of his brother. No one questions therefore that those gaunt bodies, wet with the dew, and parched with the gathering fervours of the sun of June, excruciated, emaciated, ragged, stained, and verging to corruption, are an acceptable sacrifice to the God Yahweh. Rizpah herself does not doubt it. This is the deep tragedy of the situation; but, like all the bitterest fruits of human woe, it contains at its heart a certain core of comfort. She believes that her sons are an offering by which the vengeance of Heaven is averted. Like the Mater Dolorosa at the cross, though a sword pierces her heart, she is not without dim and eager surmises that the deaths are an expiation, and these are they who have redeemed Israel. It is the absorbing thought of the day and the night to keep those precious bodies from violation. She may not bury them; the authorities will not allow it. Perhaps in some obscure way she acquiesces in the harsh decision, from a feeling that if they were decently buried they would cease to be an effectual atonement. She would therefore leave the sacrifice complete and unimpaired. But there was one thing which she could not endure—that the vultures should peck out the eyes which she had loved and kissed, or that the lions and the jackals should tear the limbs which to her imagination were still the tender and helpless limbs of infants. Therefore the woman, in the sacred exaltation of a hungry and imperishable love, took up her station by the gallows, nor would she move by day or by night. All through the summer, till the autumn rains should come and wash the bodies, preparing them for the legal

burial long delayed, she camped on that ghostly ground. The great birds wheeled, screaming, in the air by day, but she scared them from the bodies of her dead if they approached. And in the solemn and fearful night, when strong men might fear to be abroad, this delicate woman, strong with that supernatural strength which is the dower of motherhood, watched by her solitary fire, unafraid of the roaring and yelping beasts, subduing them perhaps by her silence and immobility into a kind of awed tameness in her presence, but rising even from the snatched slumbers to drive them away with her feeble hands if ever they ventured to come near to her beloved dead. . . . This is the atonement that must surely atone—this prolonged sacrifice of love in the heart of a mother.[1]

A lonely watcher on the mountain-height.
  There with her dead a solemn tryst to keep,
  Communing silently with anguish deep,
Yet patient, strong in Love's untiring might,
The morn's red day-beam found her, and the night
  Bathed her in gentle dews, yet might not steep
  The pulse of agony in gentler sleep,
Soft stealing o'er that mourner's aching sight;
There, while the long and summer sun rode high,
  No cry of bird awoke the solitude;
  When darkness fell, no savage thing and rude
To mar the spell of holy grief drew nigh,—
She watched, till heaven with kind and pitying eye
  With reconciling tears their dust bedewed![2]

4. Absalom drew to his side Ahithophel, the king's counsellor, and carefully fanned every flame of discontent throughout the land. When the conspiracy was ripe, he departed for Hebron with a great following, under pretence of a sacred vow. There the mask was thrown off, and Absalom was publicly proclaimed king.

The news fell like a thunderbolt on David. The hero of so many hairbreadth escapes, the seasoned warrior, the conqueror of the ancestral enemies of Israel, and once the darling of his people, he fled from Jerusalem, accompanied only by a few faithful servants and his foreign body-guard of six hundred men. It was apparently early on the morning of the day after he had received

[1] R. F. Horton, *Women of the Old Testament*, 158.
[2] Dora Greenwell.

the news of the rebellion that the king left the city of Jerusalem. There is no single day in the Jewish history of which so elaborate an account remains as that which describes this memorable flight. There is none, we may add, that combines so many of David's characteristics—his patience, his high-spirited religion, his generosity, his calculation; we miss only his daring courage. It was a day of remarkable proof both of loyalty and of hatred. Before leaving Jerusalem, Ittai, apparently a newly arrived captain of the Gittites, who formed part of the royal guard, was offered the opportunity to transfer his allegiance if he wished. David's generous proposal called forth a yet more generous reply. David had evidently not lost his old power of winning the hearts of men. "And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will thy servant be."

The start was made, across the "brook Kidron," or dark ravine on the east of the city, "toward the way of the wilderness." Signs of popular sorrow, probably among the poorer dwellers of the countryside, accompanied the march—"all the country wept with a loud voice." The priesthood, too, was faithful to the king, who had loved the sanctuary. Zadok and Abiathar and their brother Levites appeared carrying the ark, as if Jordan were again to be crossed as in the days of Joshua. David, in words of devout resignation, refused their offer to accompany him in his exile: "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: but if he say thus, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." David also suggested that Zadok might be of more service to him by remaining in the city, and sending word by his son Ahimaaz, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.

As the ascent of the Mount of Olives was being made, amid all the outward signs of mourning, the king walking barefoot and his head veiled, an additional blow fell in the news that Ahithophel the trusted counsellor had joined the rebellion. A prayer of the king that Jehovah would "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" met, as the event proved, with a speedy answer. As the procession halted on the top of the Mount of Olives at

some sanctuary or familiar place of prayer, a loyal friend of the king, hitherto unmentioned, appeared, viz. Hushai "the Archite," with "his coat rent and earth on his head." David, knowing both his loyalty and his gift for diplomacy, advised him, instead of accompanying the flight, to go to Jerusalem, and pretend to join Absalom's party, keeping meanwhile in constant communication with the king through the priesthood.

David was now to learn that Absalom's appeal to Israel had found a willing ear in the house and tribe of Saul also. He was met at the Mount of Olives by Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, with the tidings that his master had joined Absalom in the hope that he might recover through him his grandfather's throne. A distinguished Benjamite, Shimei by name, met him soon afterwards at Bahûrim. He received David with fierce invectives, which revealed clearly enough how fresh a memory many irreconcilable spirits retained of Saul, and of his house and its cruel fate, innocent as David was in the matter. Finally, by evening the fugitives were close to Jordan, though by no means out of reach of pursuit.

5. Meanwhile Absalom came hot-foot from Hebron to Jerusalem, seized on the palace and the harem of his father, and called a council of war. Ahithophel's advice was to follow at once, overtake the king "while he is weary and weak handed," and slay him. Hushai counselled delay as the more politic course, and prevailed. The news reached David at the fords of Jordan, together with the advice to cross the river immediately. He found refuge in Mahanaim, a city of Gilead, where three wealthy sheikhs, one of them an Ammonite, provided for him and his followers. Ahithophel foresaw that Absalom's initial mistake and hesitation meant eventual failure, and anticipated his own punishment by committing suicide.

Absalom at length crossed the Jordan with a large army under the leadership of Amasa, a cousin of Joab. But the delay, which enabled him to advance to the attack with increased forces, had been still more profitable to David, who was now well prepared for the conflict. In the battle that followed, not far from Mahanaim, David's army was victorious; there was a great slaughter of the enemy, both in the battle and in the later pur-

suit through an adjoining wood. The carnage would have been even greater, had not Joab out of compassion restrained the victors. He himself, however, thought it wise to get rid of Absalom: he was not deterred by the king's earnest injunction to all his captains to spare the prince. Absalom was found entangled in his flight by his long hair, which caught in a tree; and as he hung suspended in mid-air Joab pierced him through to the heart.

There was a piteous scene in Mahanaim when the news was carried to David by a swift runner; he sobbed aloud with passionate regrets, yearning to make atonement with his own life, and it needed all the coarse practical wisdom of Joab to make the king appear in person to welcome the troops returning from victory. As for Absalom, his body was buried under a rough cairn of stones on the battle-field, far away from the grand monument which, in default of an heir, he had built to keep his memory alive.

¶ Besides the heaping of stones on ordinary graves for protection, cairns are often used to mark a sepulchre, but with varying significations. A heap of stones is invariably found at the point where the pilgrim first catches a glimpse of some hallowed spot. A second class of cairn marks the sepulchre of some great or holy man. This is distinguished by an upright staff on the top of the heap, to which are often attached certain offerings, in the shape of pieces of cloth or white rags, emblematic of mourning. The third class of cairn is very different in its signification. We read that when Absalom fled from the battle-field of Mahanaim, and was ignominiously slain by Joab, his body was flung into a pit hard by in the distant forest of Gilead, and they "laid a very great heap of stones upon him." The victorious soldiery heaped stones, with every mark of contumely, upon his carcase. Every passer-by would pick up a stone and add it to the cairn, accompanying the act with a curse on the son who had lifted up his spear against his father. The custom remains to the present day. Every track in the wilder parts of the country is marked by occasional cairns, to which every Arab as he passes contributes, and, as he hurls his stone, curses the memory of the murderer. There is no staff or fragment of rag here. The pile tells where some robber or criminal has met his end. The heap is not high, but very wide. There is one such remarkable cairn south-east of Rabbath Ammon, to mark with opprobrium the memory of a parricide of the Adwan tribe, tradition says not how long ago.

There still stands in the vale of Kedron, just below the Temple area, a sumptuous tomb hewn out of the rock, and well known to all visitors to Jerusalem as Absalom's tomb. The Jews believe that it is the monument built in the king's vale by Absalom in his lifetime for his own sepulchre. By its architecture we know that it is many centuries later than his time, and, from the Ionic pilasters round its base, cannot be earlier than the Syro-Greek period. But the Jews hold the tradition, and stones are piled against its side, cast by each passing Israelite as he invokes a curse on the rebellious son.[1]

6. The pendulum of the people's loyalty swung back to its old allegiance, and they eagerly contended for the honour of bringing the king back. Even the men of Judah, conscious of having forfeited his confidence by so readily following Absalom, repented and urged him to return. Shimei cringed at his feet. Mephibosheth established his unfaltering loyalty. Barzillai was bound to the royal house for ever by his profuse acknowledgments and the royal offers to Chimham. All seemed ending well. But one unfortunate occurrence delayed the peaceful conclusion of the whole matter. The ten tribes were greatly irritated that Judah had made and carried through all the arrangements for the king's return, and gave vent to hot, exasperating words. These the men of Judah answered with equal heat. At an inopportune moment, Sheba sounded the trumpet of sedition, and raised the cry that was destined in the days of Rehoboam again to rend the land, "Every man to his tents, O Israel." The ten tribes immediately seceded, and another formidable revolt yawned at David's feet, which was put down only by incredible exertions on the part of Joab. The death of Sheba was the last episode in this rebellion, which was quelled in blood, and always left a scar and seam in the national life.

¶ Many were the afflictions of God's servant, but out of them all he was delivered. When he had learnt the lesson, the rod was stayed. He had been chastened with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men; but God did not take away His mercy from him as from Saul, his house, his throne, and kingdom, in spite of many conflicting forces, being made sure. Thus always —the rod, the stripes, the chastisements; but amid all the love of God, carrying out His redemptive purpose, never hasting, never

[1] H. B. Tristram, *Eastern Customs in Bible Lands*, 101.

resting, never forgetting, but making all things work together till the evil is eliminated, and the soul purged. Then the after-glow of blessing, the calm ending of the life in a serene sundown.[1]

O soul, O soul, rejoice!
Thou art God's child indeed, for all thy sinning;
A poor weak child, yet His, and worth the winning
With saviour eyes and voice.

Who spake the words? Didst Thou?
They are too good, even for such a giver:
Such water, drinking once, I should feel ever
As I had drunk but now.

Yet sure the Word said so,
Teaching our lips to cry with His, Our Father!
Telling the tale of him who once did gather
His goods to him, and go!

Ah, Thou dost lead me, God!
But it is dark and starless, the way dreary;
Almost I sleep, I am so very weary
Upon this rough hill-road.

Almost! Nay, I do sleep;
There is no darkness save in this my dreaming;
Thy fatherhood above, around, is beaming;
Thy hand my hand doth keep.[2]

III.

The Closing Days.

1. Some years must have elapsed before the closing scene of David's life. The old warrior, who at the time of Absalom's rebellion was never without resource, and had to be kept back by his soldiers from the battle, is now seen in the feebleness of extreme old age, kept within the palace, where no clothing will supply warmth to his bodily frame, and he is nursed by a fair young damsel of Shunem, named Abishag. He had neglected to make any definite arrangements with regard to the succession to the throne, but his eldest surviving son was generally regarded as

[1] F. B. Meyer, *David*, 182.
[2] George MacDonald, *Poetical Works*, i. 281.

the heir. This was Adonijah, a young man of great beauty, who had always been indulged by his fond father. Like Absalom before him, he assumed the state appropriate to the heir-apparent. On his side were most of David's older supporters, including Joab and Abiathar; but, on the other hand, Bathsheba had extorted from David a promise to bequeath his kingdom to her son Solomon, then a mere youth—a promise probably known at least to the members of the court. Her cause had the powerful aid of Nathan the prophet, Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, who was in command of the king's body-guard. Adonijah, probably at the instigation of Joab, made the first move. He invited his adherents to a banquet in the valley of the Kidron, at which the cry "God save King Adonijah!" was raised.

2. But tidings of this step were brought by Nathan to Bathsheba; and on the prophet's advice she informed the king, and reminded him of his promise that her son should reign. By agreement Nathan came in and confirmed her words. Then the old lion-heart in David was stirred. Though he had reached the extreme point of physical exhaustion, he aroused himself with a flash of his former energy to take measures for the execution of the Divine will communicated to him years before. "And the king sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, verily as I sware unto thee, . . . so will I do." Not many hours passed before tidings broke in on Adonijah's feast at Enrogel that Solomon had been anointed king in Gihon by the hands of Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, and had ridden through the city on the royal mule, escorted by Benaiah and his men-at-arms. Within an hour the whole of Adonijah's supporters had melted away, and he was clinging, as a fugitive, to the horns of the altar.

¶ Lady Derby told me that she had once, many years ago, walked with Lord Beaconsfield from Hughenden to Bradenham. As they crossed that beautiful common, which we knew so well when we lived at Hampden, he stopped and said: "It was here that I passed my miserable youth." "Why miserable?" she asked. "Because," he replied, "I was devoured by ambition which I did not see any means of gratifying." In the course of our conversation there came back to me a story which was told me by

poor Leonard Montefiore, whose brilliant prospects were so sadly closed a few weeks ago while he was travelling in America, and which I have not, I think, elsewhere written down. Meeting the boy at Aston Clinton some years ago, Lord Beaconsfield asked him: "What are your aspirations?" Leonard told him very frankly, whereon he said: "You will fulfil them all; the Hebrew race to which you and I belong has learned to do everything except to fail." [1]

3. We do not know how long David lived after he had abdicated in favour of Solomon, but it is probable that the weak and bedridden king did not survive many days. He had held the reins of government for forty years; had tasted the cup of life to the full—its hardships and desperate ventures, as well as its enjoyments and the glory of satisfied ambition. He must now lay down his kingdom at the call of a higher King, who exercises dominion over all. David bravely faced the coming change, and addressed himself finally to dispose of the affairs of his kingdom. In the last charge to his son Solomon—as recorded in 1 Kings ii. —there are many things worthy of a true king. He counselled him to be strong and show himself a man. No timid or irresolute spirit could govern such a kingdom; what had been built up by manliness and courage was to be maintained by the same high qualities. He counselled him, further, to be a man of God; for only by right principle and faith in God could the throne be permanently established. Here spoke a true king, who had himself honoured Jehovah, and executed judgment and justice in the gate.

If the narrative is to be taken as genuine (it is much disputed) in which the dying king counsels Solomon to do good to Barzillai but not to let Joab or Shimei die in peace, it must be remembered that the customs of the time were very different from the present, and that the advice ascribed to David is not to be judged by our own standard. A young and untried ruler like Solomon might be endangered by opponents whom David was strong enough to spare; and the king, who had delivered up to death Saul's seven sons to atone for their father's guilt, may have feared that the curse of Shimei, or the murders of Joab, unless avenged, would bring down punishment on some other man. To us the words

[1] Sir M. E. Grant Duff, *Notes from a Diary, 1873-1881*, ii. 180.

put into David's mouth do not appear seemly for a dying man or in accordance with the noblest traits of David's character; yet it cannot be said that they are impossible.

Of David's actual death we know nothing. The sacred historians do not expend their words in describing dying scenes. One record says simply that "David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David"; another, that "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour." But perhaps the noblest is that uttered by the Holy Spirit, through the lips of St. Paul: 'David, after he had in his own generation served the counsel of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption."

¶ As poet, patriot, warrior, and devout worshipper of Jehovah, David embodied the highest ideals of his age. It is, therefore, not strange that he was idolized by his own and idealized by succeeding generations. His love for Jehovah and his people left little place in his heart for pride and tyranny. He kept always before him the noble Hebrew ideal of the kingship. Except on the one memorable occasion, when he yielded to his own base passion, he ever showed himself the loyal servant of the people. Thus, as a king, he proved, as did no other ruler in early Hebrew history, "a man after God's own heart." In the perspective of history, Saul figures as the great pioneer; but David built well on the foundations which Saul had laid. Under his leadership united Israel became a fixed reality. By closer organization, by sharing together a common capital, by uniting in successful wars against their common foes, rival tribes were led to forget their jealousies and to recognize the bond of common race, ideals, and religion. By his foreign conquests, David gave to his people peace and prestige, and prepared the way for that development of the resources of the empire and of commerce which quickly followed in the days of Solomon. David also inspired those ideals of kingly justice, as well as of world-wide dominion, which were ever after cherished by the Hebrews, and which find frequent echoes in the Messianic predictions of later prophets. In uniting all Israel under one king he also impressed upon his subjects the conception of Jehovah as the one Supreme Ruler over all the different tribes. In conquering the neighbouring nations and building up a great empire he laid the foundations of that later monotheism which was proclaimed by the great prophets of the Assyrian period.[1]

[1] C. F. Kent, *Founders and Rulers of United Israel*, 181.

DAVID.

VII.

The Character of David.

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The Character of David.

The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart.—1 Sam. xiii. 14.

1. The character of David has been very variously estimated, exaggerated praise naturally producing a revulsion to the opposite extreme. Undue weight has often been attached to the description of David as "a man after God's own heart." The phrase, which occurs only in 1 Sam. xiii. 14 (quoted thence in Acts xiii. 22), may be seen in the original context to denote one according to God's mind or purpose, one who possesses the necessary qualities for a ruler of God's people.

¶ This character has been thought by some writers to denote the highest degree of moral purity, and that therefore it could not, with truth or justice, be ascribed to David, who was certainly guilty of some very great offences, and has been plentifully loaded with others which he was entirely free from. It is evident here that the "man after God's own heart" stands in opposition to the character of Saul, who is described as acting foolishly by breaking the commandment of God by His prophet, and rejected by Him, *i.e.* deprived of the succession to the crown in his family, on account of his folly, presumption, and disobedience. And it therefore means one who should act prudently, and obey the commandments of God delivered him by His prophets, and whom therefore God would thus far approve and continue to favour. There are therefore two senses which are evidently implied in this character of the man after God's own heart; a man who should faithfully execute the will of God according as he was commanded, and who, on that account and so far, should be the object of His approbation.[1]

2. It has been more difficult to do justice to David on account of the different representations found together in the Bible but belonging to very different dates. The picture in Chronicles of a Jewish saint has led many to censure unfairly the warrior king of

[1] S. Chandler, *A Critical History of the Life of David*, 236.

a rude age. But if a critical examination of our authorities compels us to reject as unhistorical some pious deeds or noble words attributed to David, on the other hand it affords a more trustworthy standard by which to measure David's position among his contemporaries. We may sometimes gain a little, sometimes lose a little, by setting aside the later idealizing additions that have gathered like an aureole round his head; but the main outlines of his character are well defined, and the most faithful scrutiny of the record only serves to bring out more clearly the real excellences of this gifted king.

¶ What a many-coloured career that was which began amidst the pastoral solitudes of Bethlehem, and ended in the chamber where the dying ears heard the blare of the trumpets that announced the accession of Bathsheba's son! None of the great men of Scripture pass through a course of so many changes; none of them touched human life at so many points; none of them were so tempered and polished by swift alternation of heat and cold, by such heavy blows and the friction of such rapid revolutions.[1]

¶ We have pictures of strikingly good men; we have pictures of singularly bad men; we have pictures of men who are half good and half bad. None of these designations will cover David. Measured by a Christian standard, he is no saint. Measured by a heathen standard, he is no sinner. Measured by any standard, he is no mixture—he never exhibits a blending of good and bad. The David of to-day is often a direct contrast to the David of yesterday; but for his face and form we should not recognize him. Yesterday, he had one pure spiritual friendship—the devotion to Jonathan; to-day, he has many sensuous loves. Yesterday, he was modest and retiring; to-day, through vanity, he vaunts the number of his fighting men. Yesterday, he was open and confiding; to-day, he deceives his benefactor Achish. Yesterday, he was chivalrous to his enemies; to-day—if the passage be genuine—he denies forgiveness to his greatest general. Yesterday, he saved the life of Saul, his foe; to-day, he takes the life of Uriah, his friend. David has in his veins the strength of two conflicting streams of heredity; yet his deepest sense is that of his own nothingness. His name has become almost a synonym for the conviction of personal sin. To the city of his habitation he was led by a rough way, because the rough way was for him the only right way; his mission was to proclaim the heart's need of God.[2]

[1] A. Maclaren, *The Life of David, as Reflected in his Psalms*, 1, 3.
[2] G. Matheson, *The Representative Men of the Bible*, i. 274.

I.

His Attractiveness.

1. All traditions concerning David agree in stating that he was an attractive personality. He is introduced as a youth, "ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look upon," and from the first he was successful in gaining the goodwill of others. He owed his life on one occasion to the devoted fidelity of his friend Jonathan, and on another to the wifely courage of Michal. Even when he served Achish he ingratiated himself so much with his Philistine master that, despite appearances, his confidence in him remained unshaken. As king, he maintained a hold on Joab, who, rude and violent as he showed himself, stood by David in every great crisis. Ittai, mercenary soldier though he was, refused to forsake him when his people were in revolt. The greatness of David's crime in the matter of Uriah is intensified by the attachment the injured husband evidently had for the person of his sovereign.

¶ Speaking of Dr. Chalmers, Dr. John Brown says: He was like Agamemnon, a native ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν, and there was about him "that divinity that doth hedge a king." You felt a power, in him, and going from him, drawing you to him in spite of yourself. He was in this respect a *solar* man, he drew after him his own firmament of planets. They, like all free agents, had their centrifugal forces acting ever towards an independent, solitary course, but the centripetal also was there, and they moved with and around their imperial sun,—gracefully or not, willingly or not, as the case might be, but there was no breaking loose: they again, in their own spheres of power, might have their attendant moons, but all were bound to the great massive luminary in the midst. There is to us a continual mystery in this power of one man over another. We find it acting everywhere, with the simplicity, the ceaselessness, the energy of gravitation; and we may be permitted to speak of this influence as obeying similar conditions; it is proportioned to *bulk*—for we hold to the notion of a bigness in souls as well as bodies—one soul differing from another in quantity and momentum as well as in quality and force, and its intensity increases by nearness.[1]

[1] Dr. John Brown, *Horæ Subsecivæ*, ii. 117.

2. Nor was this devotion and admiration undeserved. A brave and successful warrior, who had fought many a campaign against his country's foes, he safely led and ruled the rough men who gathered round him as an outlaw. His justice was experienced alike by Nabal's shepherds and by his own followers; his concern for his followers' lives was seen when he would not drink the water from the well of Bethlehem. Hasty and passionate he could be, even in his zeal for justice; but far more marked is his signal generosity. He was possessed of what may be termed a chivalrous sense of honour, and it is that which gives such a romantic colouring to his life and especially to his earlier years. Again and again it was in his power to put Saul out of the way and set the crown on his own head. He had but to lift his hand, to give a sign to one of his followers; indeed, he had but to turn away his eyes and for a moment to intermit his watchfulness of his followers, and Saul would have been no longer an obstacle. Saul, too, had been repudiated as God's king, and he himself had been anointed. It was by his own fierce spirit of hatred that Saul had put himself in David's power. Was this not a clear suggestion of Providence that David should make away with his enemy? But as King Arthur's knight Pelleas could not slay the sleeping friend who had so grossly betrayed him, but thought it sufficient rebuke to lay his naked sword across his throat, so David could not lift his spear against the Lord's anointed, but judged it enough to rebuke his enmity by showing him that he had been in his power.

> Wide open were the gates,
> And no watch kept; and in thro' these he past,
> And heard but his own steps, and his own heart
> Beating, for nothing moved but his own self,
> And his own shadow. Then he crost the court,
> And spied not any light in hall or bower,
> But saw the postern portal also wide . . .
> Then was he ware of three pavilions rear'd . . .
> And in the third were Gawain and Ettarre . . .
> Back, as a coward slinks from what he fears
> To cope with, or a traitor proven, or hound
> Beaten, did Pelleas in an utter shame
> Creep with his shadow thro' the court again,
> Fingering at his sword-handle until he stood
> There on the castle-bridge once more, and thought,
> "I will go back, and slay them where they lie."

And so went back, and seeing them yet in sleep
Said, "Ye, that so dishallow the holy sleep,
Your sleep is death," and drew the sword, and thought,
"What! slay a sleeping knight? the King hath bound
And sworn me to this brotherhood"; again
"Alas that ever a knight should be so false."
Then turn'd, and so return'd, and groaning laid
The naked sword athwart their naked throats,
There left it, and them sleeping.[1]

3. This romantic aspect of the character of David was due to the markedly affectionate side of his disposition. No words ever described the intensity of friendship so well as David's lament over Jonathan. His passionate grief over the sickness of Bathsheba's firstborn child and his sorrow at the death of Absalom, reveal the deep tenderness of his nature. As long as the Bible is read, the words, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" will be typical of the fullest expression of paternal love and affliction. Even in the story of his sin the same warm and impulsive character is displayed. Nothing, not even the circumstances of a wild and lawless age, can condone David's crime; but in the completeness of his repentance the character of a tender-hearted and generous man is revealed.

¶ Catherine saw in human beings not their achievements, but their possibilities. Therefore she quickened repentance by a positive method, not by morbid analysis of evil, not by lurid pictures of the consequences of sin, but by filling the soul with glowing visions of that holiness which to see is to long for. She never despaired of quickening in even the most degraded that flame of "holy desire" which is the earnest of true holiness to be. We find her impatient of mint and cummin, of over-anxious self-scrutiny. "Strive that your holy desires increase," she writes to a correspondent; "and let all these other things alone." "I, Catherine—write to you—with desire," so open all her letters. Holy Desire! It is not only the watchword of her teaching: it is also the true key to her personality.[2]

[1] Tennyson, *Idylls of the King—Pelleas and Ettarre.*

[2] V. D. Scudder, *Saint Catherine of Siena, as Seen in Her Letters*, 7.

II.

His Sinfulness.

1. But there are dark traits in David, which the Bible makes no attempt to disguise. Nothing in the annals of Oriental courts can well exceed the base intrigue with Bathsheba and the cowardly murder of Uriah. No cruelty towards a conquered army could well be greater than that with which David treated the Ammonites. And, although another side of his failings has been much exaggerated by some ancient and several modern critics, there are traces of deceitfulness in David which recall his ancestor Jacob and impair the nobility and beauty of the general impression he leaves on us. The deceit practised at Nob may be excused by his circumstances; his professions of loyalty to Achish may have been cautious words used to one who had power to compel; but the continued fraud practised at Ziklag points to a man who was used to crooked dealing; he could induce Hushai to counteract Ahithophel's advice by mean and treacherous ways; and after his sin with Bathsheba he stooped to base and cowardly means to conceal his guilt and remove Uriah from his path.

2. The great sins of his life, his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, are perhaps but the common crimes of an Oriental despot; but, so far as we can judge, they were not common to Israel, and David as well as his subjects knew of a higher moral standard. It has been said, "But such sin is so unlike David's character." Doubtless it was, on the theory that David was a character mingled of good and evil. But on David's own theory, that he was an utterly weak person without the help of God, the act is perfectly like David. It is David's self. It is what David would naturally do when he had left hold of God. Had he left hold of God in the wilderness he would have become a mere robber-chieftain. He does leave hold of God in his palace on Zion, and he becomes a mere Eastern despot.

¶ It is not known very well how long David remained hardened and sullen after his great and double sin. At least he remained a certain number of months unawakened, it would

seem, to the exceeding badness of his act. Perhaps no one in the kingdom knew quite the full details of the affair. Some may have known or surmised the part of the transaction that occurred in Jerusalem, and some may have known the part that occurred in the field with the army. But perhaps not many were able to connect the things together, or saw through the intrigue from beginning to end. And the king himself, drunk with illicit pleasures, seemed dead to every feeling of a nobler kind, whether of shame or of remorse. But proportionate to his hardening in sin was the softening and break-down that came on him when the prophet's words found their way to his heart. After a severe winter, the thaws of spring come with the greatest violence. When the earth is bound with an iron frost, and the streams are locked in ice, it is then, when the thaw wind sweeps over the fields, that the freshening is wildest, when the ice breaks in pieces, and the rivers roll like mountains to the sea. And when the quickening spirit breathed upon the king's heart, it broke, and dissolved into the wildest sorrow. The remorse or the repentance of a strong man is a thing worthy to be seen. If the man be very strong, he may remain master of himself, and, in the view of others at least, give no sign. But the repentance may be so strong as to master him; and then he will lie, as David here, convulsed and shaken like one in the grasp of a fit, uttering the sorest cries of sorrow, careless who is looking on, thinking only of Him against whom he has so grievously offended.[1]

3. Lastly, David's weakness in dealing with his own family is little to his credit. The imperious Joab was "too hard" for him; Amnon and Adonijah were indulged and spoiled, and even the outrageous conduct of the former met with no punishment; Absalom and Adonijah were allowed to declare their pretensions to the crown, while David neglected to take proper measures to determine the succession to the throne. But in justice to David it must be remembered that his family difficulties were in part the natural outcome of polygamy, and in part due to the state of culture of his time. His faults are the faults peculiar to a versatile genius: a lack of absolute truthfulness, a failure, in the face of sudden and powerful temptation, to control his passions, a selfish fondness for his children. Like many another man in the world's history, he developed rapidly and nobly in the face of hardship and opposition, and fell in the moment of prosperity and

[1] A. B. Davidson, *Waiting upon God*, 56.

success. His life-history, therefore, is a tragedy because it failed to realize the promise of his earlier years.

¶ "Moreover," he continued, "it is much easier to love God perfectly in adversity than in prosperity. For tribulation having nothing in itself that is lovable, save that it is God's gift, it is much easier to go by it straight to the will of God, and to unite ourselves to His good pleasure. Easier, I say, than by prosperity, which has attractions of its own that captivate our senses, and, like Dalila, lull them to sleep, working in us a subtle change, so that we begin insensibly to love for its own sake the prosperity which God sends us, instead of bestowing all our grateful love on God who sends it, and to whom all thanks and praise are due."[1]

III.

His Religiousness.

1. It is not necessary to ignore David's weaknesses and despotic moods, or to make the primitive hero into a tender-hearted saint, in order to be able to appreciate his deep religious character and his importance for the religion of Israel. As Moses sheds a lustre on Israel's past, so does David on Israel's future; and in troublous days it was his name that revived Israel's dying hope and its faith in God. Jehovah, the God of Israel, became through him at once the supreme dweller in Jerusalem, the neighbour, almost the fellow-inmate—nay, the host and father—of Israel's king. Jerusalem, the city of the king, became at the same time the city of God, the holy city. David's family was Jehovah's dynasty, and its members Jehovah's sons.

¶ David, in spite of his grievous falls, had upon his heart and conscience continually the impress—awful, yet most fascinating—of the majesty, the beauty, the tenderness, the encompassing presence, the boundless magnificence of God. This great possession remained with him throughout his life.[2]

2. His history is that of a man kept out of his destiny for years, while the whole land is crying out for such services as he could render. Hated, maligned, wronged, pursued, and persecuted by the king whom he had served with rare capacity and unswerv-

[1] J. P. Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, 141.
[2] H. P. Liddon, *Sermons on the Old Testament*, 134.

ing loyalty, for long years he was a homeless outlaw, driven from the abodes of his own beloved people, and hunted like a partridge on the hills and in the wilderness. During the whole of that time there is only one instance recorded of his faith having broken down, and that is very near to the end of his long and weary exile. Apparently his trust in God's goodness never failed him. Tried and wronged—seemingly beyond endurance—he never rebelled against either the Lord or His anointed. It was for God to give him the kingdom, and therefore he refused to take one step towards the throne apart from the direct Divine impulse.

3. David's pride was in being honoured of God. His was a true religious nature that did not hesitate to approach what even in that age seemed religious eccentricity. At the height of his political power, he cast his royal robes aside, assumed the white linen garments of the priesthood, and played, as in the days of his old shepherd-minstrel life, upon stringed instruments. He joined with unrestrained enthusiasm in one of those sacred dances which in early and later times have often in the East expressed profound religious emotion. We know what Saul's daughter Michal, who inherited something of her father's temper, thought and said of him; we know how she was rebuked. And the same disposition was shown in David's anxiety about the temple which he was not permitted to build, about the priesthood which he ordered and organized, about all that related to the services of religion. Even his terrible sins of lust and bloodshed only throw his deep repentance into stronger relief, as the expression of his soul's inmost feelings towards God:

"Against thee only have I sinned,
And done this evil in thy sight:
That thou mightest be justified in thy saying,
And clear when thou art judged.
Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean:
Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Cast me not away from thy presence,
And take not thy holy Spirit from me.
O give me the comfort of thy help again,
And stablish me with thy princely Spirit.
Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God,
And my tongue shall sing of thy righteousness."

This is the reason why David is called, in contrast to Saul, "a man after God's own heart." Certainly David's sins were not after God's own heart, but beyond and beneath those sins there was a permanent character of soul, instinct with the fear and with the love of God, that survived and conquered them.

¶ Though David was imbued with principles of true religion, it cannot be denied that in the earlier records he is not represented as altogether superior to the superstitions of his age. It would perhaps be unjust to attribute the slaughter of Saul's sons at the request of the Gibeonites entirely to cold-blooded policy. Rather was David actuated by a belief that the famine would not cease till the sons of the late king had expiated their father's crime in violating the ancient treaty with Gibeon; and it was for this reason that he permitted them to be hung up before Jehovah. This single incident, however, shows the impossibility of judging David by a Christian or even a modern standard.[1]

IV.

His Kingliness.

But it is especially as a ruler that David left his mark on his own generation and on posterity. He set himself to free his country from its enemies, to secure it against invasion, and to make the people one. Jerusalem was virtually his creation; he strove to make it the religious and political centre of his kingdom; and the discontent of Judah bears witness to the zeal with which he laboured for the whole nation, and not only for his own tribe. His efforts were the more successful because with remarkable penetration he always knew the right measures to adopt. He won the Judæan elders by judicious presents, but he could wait at Hebron for Ishbosheth's fall; he thanked the men of Jabesh-gilead, disavowed all part in Abner's murder, retired from the first attack of Absalom, but kept up communication with the capital. In all the varied difficulties of his eventful life he was never without resource. Nor was he negligent of the administration of his kingdom. It is said that he "executed judgment and justice unto all his people"; and this statement is borne out by the readiness with which he listened to Nathan or the woman of Tekoa.

[1] F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Biblical History of the Hebrews*, 191.

Doubtless he once forced a census on an unwilling people, but except in one instance we never hear of his using his power for selfish ends. He was never fighting for his own hand, but always for the cause of God and the one people who held up the torch of truth; and in his vigour, and deep religious sense, amidst whatever faults, he endeavoured to set before him the welfare of his people, and the cause of God. He was in every sense David, the King. And the significance of his rule is that it clearly manifested the compatibility of a human hereditary monarchy with the idea of a Divinely ruled polity. In David the hopes of the nation were centred, as in one who had been chosen by God to fulfil and realize the theocratic sovereignty.

¶ From the beginning to the end of his life, David remains the youth who, for his first encounter, dares to challenge Goliath, and at the same time the captain who, though ever victorious, is yet patient enough to await at Hebron the end of the reign of Saul, the death of his son, and the offer of the crown. General, diplomatist, poet, and administrator, he realizes the perfect type of the monarch—he is beyond doubt the greatest genius of the Biblical world. His accession had a flavour of the marvellous, and the reign which achieved the constitution of a state out of such hostile and independent elements as the tribes, and the discipline of a people so inclined to anarchy, impatient of restraint and always ready to revolt, was one long miracle. Such was David, without exalting his qualities or palliating his weaknesses. This is the unscrupulous brigand, the drunkard, the descendant of a courtesan, the thief, the bandit, the rogue, the assassin, depicted by certain schools because our religious traditions have given eternal sovereignty to his race. Had he but lived some centuries earlier among an idolatrous and fiction-loving people, he would not have been counted as an ancestor of a God—he himself would have been placed in the ranks of the Immortals.[1]

¶ David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, down as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew. Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking, in truth, always that: "A succession of falls"? Man can do no other. In this wild

[1] M. Dieulafoy, *David the King*, 266.

element of a life he has to struggle onwards; now fallen, deep abased; and ever, with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again still onwards. That his struggle be a faithful unconquerable one: that is the question of questions.[1]

¶ Often, no doubt, the impulse was fleeting, and the broken purpose wasted in air. And often, too, the impulse was vague, and resulted in no definite action; yet not on that account, perhaps, to be cast aside as valueless. "I have a belief of my own," says one of George Eliot's characters, "and it comforts me —That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is, and cannot do what we would, we are part of the Divine power against evil."[2]

[1] Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship.*
[2] Sir Edward Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, i. 447.

DAVID.

VIII.

THE "PSALMS OF DAVID."

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The "Psalms of David.

The sweet psalmist of Israel.—2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

1. Quite apart from its altogether unique religious value, Hebrew poetry can justly claim its place among the great literatures of the world. It combines a simplicity which they seldom equal with a brilliant but chastened imagination which is all its own. Its power is nowhere more vividly seen than in its descriptions of nature, which the rapt eyes of the Hebrew poet sometimes see touched into glad sympathy with redeemed humanity and lit with the glory of the latter days. In a word or two, he can produce the clearest pictures and the most startling contrasts. The sower with his tear-stained face is transformed by a touch into the glad reaper who comes home with his arm full of sheaves (cxxvi. 5, 6). The only marriage-song in the Psalter (xlv.) shines with all the brilliant splendour of the East. It opens the gates of an ivory palace and shows us trains of bejewelled ladies who enter to the ravishing sounds of music.

¶ The Hebrew speech approves itself one of the fittest vehicles of poetical expression. Like other Semitic languages, it is marked by great simplicity of form. The rigidity of its three-lettered root scheme, its lack of precise distinction of time within the verb forms, its weakness in connective particles, and its general incapacity for abstractions, prevented its ever attaining the subtle logical effects of Greek or our complex modern languages. But this very failure in philosophical grasp enhances the pictorial power of the speech. In Hebrew all things appear in action. The verb is the predominant element in the sentence. And, though the shades of time-distinction are blurred, the richness of the language in intensive forms throws the precise complexion of the act into clear, strong light. But even the simplicity of the tenses heightens the pictorial effect; and the paratactic connexion of the clauses gives the Hebrew sentence the appearance of a series of artistic strokes, often of gemlike brilliance. Hebrew possesses

likewise a great wealth of synonyms, especially in descriptions of the common scenes and interests of life, and in the region of feeling. The language is equally rich in imagery. The daring boldness and luxuriance of its figures are, indeed, almost oppressive to the modern mind. But the Hebrew poet himself was unconscious of any wanton riot of imagination. To him the bold, swift changes of metaphor were natural reflections of the play of passion in the soul. For Hebrew poetry is pre-eminently passionate. The "simple, sensuous" speech is but a veil, which thrills and quivers with the poet's every passing emotion.[1]

2. The main body of Old Testament poetry turns directly on the praise of God, and the varying emotions of the devout soul in its relation to Him. In this region the poetry of Israel is unique. There is religious poetry among other nations—often far surpassing that of Israel in sustained reflection on the mysteries of life, and dramatic representations of the conflict of the individual with the inexorable decrees of fate—but in no other religious literature do we find ourselves in such close and intimate touch with God. The poets of Greece and Babylonia "feel after God." To the pure-eyed seers of Israel He was as luminously self-evident a Being as their own selves. In Him their poetry "lives and moves," and thrills and glows with fervid emotion. And it is this vital contact with God that gives that literature its perennial freshness and inspiration. We may know more of the Eternal than even the loftiest souls in Israel. But such was the immediacy of their feeling of God, and their power to express that feeling, that their lyrical utterances remain the classics of devotion. The Christian world still gives voice to its faith and hope and joy in God through the rapturous strains of the "sweet singers of Israel." And the best of our hymns have caught their glow at this altar.

Of this distinctively religious poetry of Israel the finest gems are found in the Psalter, which has been aptly described as "the heart of the Bible"; for what the heart is in man—the welling fountain of his feelings and imaginations, his joys and griefs and manifold cravings and aspirations—the Psalter is in the Bible. Thus the Psalter has touched and held the hearts of the devout in all the ages. Here heart speaks to heart, deep responds to deep, on the great realities of spiritual life.

[1] A. R. Gordon, *The Poets of the Old Testament*, 3.

¶ The human heart is like a ship on a wild sea, driven by winds from all corners of the world. And what find we for the most part in the Psalter, but the earnest words of men tossed about by such winds? Where can one find nobler words of joy than those the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving contain? In these thou mayest gaze into the heart of all the saints, as into lovely pleasure gardens, or into heaven itself, and see how fine, pleasant, delightsome flowers spring up therein from all manner of beautiful, gladsome thoughts of God because of His goodness. And, again, where canst thou find deeper, more plaintive and heart-moving words of sorrow than in the Psalms of lamentation? There too thou mayest look into the heart of all the saints—but as into death, or hell itself. How dark and gloomy all things are when the heart is troubled by the sense of the wrath of God! And so also when they speak of fear or hope, they use words that no painter could approach in colouring, or even an orator like Cicero in vividness of description.[1]

I.

The Psalms.

1. The Hebrew Psalter is the hymn-book of the holy catholic Church throughout the world. It has been so from the beginning, and in all probability it will be so to the end. There are indeed some churches which do not lift their praises to God in the very words of the Psalter, and there are other churches which praise Him in a multitude of other hymns besides those of the Psalter. But even where the psalms are not directly used, their words and thoughts have been appropriated, so that many of the noblest modern hymns are but echoes of the songs of the ancient Jewish church, and written under the immediate inspiration of the Psalter. It will be enough to recall Luther's great hymn:

A safe stronghold our God is still,

which is nothing but the German version of the Forty-sixth Psalm.

¶ It was "out of the depths" that the psalmists cried to God, and the deep of our experience answers to the deep of theirs. In their words we find our own emotions expressed and see our own

[1] A. R. Gordon, *The Poets of the Old Testament*, 98.

experience reflected. They knew what was in man; and that is why they "find" us. They knew the strangeness and the sorrow of life, but amidst it all they also knew God to be their shelter and their strength. Never have there been men who faced more honestly the problems of life, or felt its pathos more keenly. Life was a mystery, and they knew that by searching they could never fully find its meaning out; but they searched like the brave men they were, till sometimes their hearts grew bitter and throbbed with pain (lxiii. 21). They voice that "sense of tears in mortal things" which is felt by all who look with fearless and unconventional eyes at the pain and surprises of life.[1]

2. More persistently than any other book in the Bible does the Psalter bring home to us the overwhelming sense of the reality and personality of God. The sight of His gracious face was better to the psalmists than abundance of corn and wine, and His presence by the side of the spirit that was perplexed soothed it into peace again. The "strangers and pilgrims" are yet in some strange sense the guests of God, daily gathering around His hospitable table in a world that is full of His goodness. From every storm there is a refuge in the shadow of His wings, and there the weary soul can lie in peace and look up with a smile, like a weaned child on the bosom of his mother. The psalms were written and sung by men who counted God their friend.

¶ The Psalter is always serious and sometimes sad; yet it is sad only to transform sadness into joy, and its main characteristic is gladness. In no direction does this appear more clearly than in its delight in nature. This delight is not the simply, innocently sensuous delight of the Song of Songs. What the poet there did unconsciously is done consciously by the psalmists. They glorify nature as the vision and language of God. Sometimes they are content to give a picture in a few lines, like that of the strong sun running his course in Ps. xix. No application is made; the poet trusts the sacramental power of the mere natural beauty of the thing. Ps. xix. does indeed end with a moral reflection. It is a beautiful one, but surely forms a separate piece from the first half of the poem. The juncture of the two is just what would be approved in a popular hymn-book; the artist and the sacramentalist (if the twain be not one) might wish the two psalms were still given separately. Sometimes there is a magnificent theophany—the Lord manifesting Himself in the

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Messages of the Psalmists*, 4.

thunderstorm, as in xviii., xxix., and the conclusion of lxxvii. Sometimes the theophany is rather suggested than described, as in xcvi., where the coming of spring is the advent of the Lord to judge. There is a famous addition in some copies of the Septuagint of this psalm: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigneth from the tree." This is thought to have been added in Christian times, but as far as the context comes into the argument, the words may be taken in a sense which is quite in harmony with the psalmist's sacramental vision of the awakening forest. Sometimes, as in civ., we have an elaborate description of all the dædal life of nature in which ascription of praise to the Creator, Guide, and Provider is continually interwoven; through and over all runs the melody of simple joy.[1]

3. Most of the psalms are direct addresses to God. The rest of them are devout meditations upon the Divine word, and the blessedness of those who receive it into their hearts, or varied expressions of spiritual life arising from the most intimate and inspiring relations with God, and suitable to the sanctuary. The central and ruling idea of the whole is worship in its most comprehensive sense, and is embodied in a single impressive sentence in Ps. xcv.:

> "Oh come, bowing down let us worship,
> Let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker;
> For he is our God,
> And we are the people of his care,
> The flock of his hand."

II.

David and the Psalms.

No problem seems so easy, and few are in reality so difficult, as that of determining the ultimate origin of the individual psalms. Many of the superscriptions seem to contain information, as precise as it is welcome, with regard to the origin and occasion of the psalms to which they are attached. But it is quite certain that the superscriptions are not original and integral to the psalms themselves, for the superscriptions of the Greek version do not

[1] A. Nairne, *The Faith of the Old Testament*, 199.

quite agree with those of the Hebrew; sometimes they assign to David (cf. xcv.) or to other authors (for example, Haggai and Zechariah; cf. cxlvi.) a psalm which is anonymous in the Hebrew; and sometimes they add information which is not warranted by the Hebrew text (cf. cxliv., where to "David" the Greek version adds "touching Goliath"). The Syriac version again differs both from the Greek and from the Hebrew. Had the titles been original to the psalms, such variety would have been impossible. Therefore it is fair to conclude that the titles are no part of the psalms, but were added afterwards. The time when they were added cannot be exactly determined. Some would be prefixed at the time of the earlier compilations, others when the collections were made. Several of the titles in the LXX show, what one or two psalms in the Hebrew exhibit, a combination of inconsistent traditions as regards both author and occasion. As a whole, the titles represent an early but far from contemporary tradition, and are for the most part uncritical in character.

Further, the superscriptions are sometimes at variance with the explicit statements of the historical books. A curious illustration of this is found in Ps. xxxiv., whose superscription calls the Philistine king before whom David feigned madness Ahimelech instead of Achish (1 Sam. xxi. 14). Again, the superscriptions are sometimes at variance with the contents of the psalms themselves. For example, Ps. lix. contemplates a situation in which certain cruel and blasphemous men go about the city, whereas the superscription assigns it to the occasion when David's house was watched by Saul's emissaries. In the same psalm, the enemies of the singer are described as the nations, that is, the heathen.

¶ By the titles seventy-three psalms are assigned to David, the principal groups being Ps. iii.–xli. (omitting x. and xxxiii.) and li.–lxx. (omitting lxvi. and lxvii.). In the LXX the number is somewhat larger, the title "to David" being added to fourteen more (including xciii.–xcix. Heb.), but omitted in some MSS from three or four others. The following special occasions are named in the Hebrew titles: iii., when he fled from Absalom; vii., concerning the words of Cush, a Benjamite; xviii., when Jehovah delivered him from his enemies and from Saul; xxx., at the dedication of the House; xxxiv., when he changed his behaviour before Ahimelech; li., after his rebuke by Nathan; lii., when Doeg denounced him to Saul; liv., when the Ziphites betrayed his

hiding-place; lvi., when the Philistines took him in Gath; lvii., when he fled from Saul, in the cave; lix., when Saul's messengers watched the house to kill him; lx., after the defeat of Edom in the Valley of Salt; lxiii., in the wilderness of Judah; cxlii., when he was in the cave.[1]

1. It may be questioned whether the Hebrew phrase rendered "Psalm of David" was originally intended to imply authorship, though undoubtedly this must have been the view taken by the time the historical notices, which appear chiefly in the second book, were added. But there are cases where the idea of authorship is altogether excluded by the simple fact that the psalm is assigned not to a man but to a guild, namely, the sons of Korah, that is, the Korahitic guild of temple-singers (cf. xlii.–xlix.). The psalms so superscribed form a collection which, for some reason that we are left to infer, was associated with this particular guild. In other words this title, together with the kindred title "Psalm of Asaph," appears to be a liturgical designation, the clue to which is now lost. Possibly the title "Psalm of David" is to be similarly explained, especially as it is often accompanied by the certainly liturgical direction rendered "For the Chief Musician" in our English Bibles, and the Hebrew preposition rendered by "of" and "to" is in both cases the same. It is easy, of course, to see why later ages should have believed in David as the author of the psalms with which his name, for whatever reason, was associated. He was known to be a great minstrel and poet (cf. 2 Sam. i.), an ardent worshipper of Jehovah, and earnestly bent upon building Him a temple; and so he not unnaturally came to be regarded not only as the father of religious song, but as the composer of much of the Psalter.

But the majority of the psalms ascribed to David cannot be his; for (1) many are of unequal poetical merit, and, instead of displaying the freshness and originality which we should expect in the founder of Hebrew psalmody, contain frequent conventional phrases (*e.g.* Ps. vi., xxxi., xxxv., xl. 13 ff.), and reminiscences of earlier psalms, which betray the poet of a later age. (2) Some have pronounced Aramaisms, the occurrence of which in an early poem of Judah is entirely without analogy, or other marks of lateness. (3) Others have stylistic affinities with psalms which,

[1] H. A. White, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, i. 571.

upon independent grounds, must be assigned to an age much later than that of David: though the alphabetical arrangement (Pss. ix.–x., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxlv.), for instance, cannot be proved to have been unused as early as David's day, the known examples of it are much later (Lam. i.–iv., Prov. xxxi. 10–31); and at least Ps. xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxlv. are shown by their general tone and style to belong to the later products of Hebrew poetry. (4) Many are unadapted to David's situation or character. (5) Not infrequently also the psalms ascribed to David presuppose the circumstances or character of a later age. Ps. lxix. 35 f. implies an approaching restoration of Jerusalem and Judah; Ps. lxviii. 4 ("Make a highway for him that rideth through the deserts") points to the same historical situation as Isa. xl. 3; Ps. xxii. 27–30, lxv. 2, lxviii. 31, lxxxvi. 9 presuppose the prophetic teaching (Isa. ii. 2–4, etc.) of the acceptance of Israel's religion by the nations of the earth.

Many also of the same psalms, it is difficult not to feel, express an intensity of religious devotion, a depth of spiritual insight, and a maturity of theological reflection, beyond what we should expect from David or David's age. David had many high and honourable qualities: he was loyal, generous, disinterested, amiable, a faithful friend, a just and benevolent ruler; and the narrative in the Books of Samuel show that his religion elevated and ennobled his aims, and, except on the occasion of his great fall, exerted a visible influence upon the tenor of his life. Still, as we should not gather from the history that he was exposed to quite such a succession of trials and afflictions as are represented in the psalms ascribed to him, so we should scarcely gather from it that he was a man of the deep and intense spiritual feeling reflected in the psalms that bear his name. Every indication converges to the same conclusion, namely, that the "Davidic" psalms spring, in fact, from many different periods of Israelitish history, from the time of David himself downwards; and that in the varied moods which they reflect—despondency, trouble, searchings of heart, penitence, hope, confidence, thankfulness, exultation—or the various situations which they shadow forth—distress, sickness, oppression or persecution, deliverance—they set before us the experiences of many men and of many ages of the national life.

2. On the other hand, a real basis of fact seems to underlie the Jewish tradition which links the beginnings of psalmody with David. David was first introduced to Saul as a minstrel; as a deviser of musical instruments he is named in Amos vi. 5. The Lament over Saul and Jonathan, a secular song, reveals to us David's poetic power; as a composer of sacred poems he appears in the appendix to Samuel (2 Sam. xxii., xxiii. 1–7) and in Chronicles (esp. 1 Chron. xvi. 7–36). How much older this representation may be it is hard to say; but it points to a tradition that David was the father of Hebrew psalmody, and it would be rash to deny the possibility that some psalms or portions of psalms of Davidic authorship are to be found in the Psalter. In the complex personality of David the emotional sensibilities that make the poet formed a rich element. He had a true genius for friendship, and celebrated the noblest of his friendships in immortal verse. But the soul that was knit in such bonds of tender affection was inspired by no less pure a passion for his God. His zeal for Jehovah led him to dance in prophetic ecstasy before the ark. And the same ardent enthusiasm can hardly have failed at other times to express itself in song. In this varied, many-sided, strangely-chequered life, with its startling vicissitudes, its religious aspiration and endeavour, its heights and depths of experience of good and evil—with its love of music and gift of lyric song—with the incitements to the use of that gift springing from the companionship of prophets like Samuel and Nathan, from the promises they gave, and the hopes they inspired for the future of the kingdom—can any one say that there is not abundant material for psalm-composition, or sufficient motive or skill to engage in it? Had the anointing to be king, the trials at Saul's court, the vicissitudes of the wilderness persecution, the bringing up of the ark, the promises of Nathan, the rebellion of Absalom, the sin with Bathsheba itself and the penitence that followed, no power in them to draw forth such psalmody?

¶ It is allowed that for many centuries David had at least the reputation of being the founder of psalmody in Israel. In 2 Sam. xxiii. 1 he is described as being "lovely (or pleasant) in Israel's songs of praise" (R.V.m.); 1 Sam. xvi. 18 describes his youthful skill upon the harp; 1 Chron. xxiii. 5 and 2 Chron. xxix. 25 describe his introducing stringed instruments into the service of

the sanctuary to accompany the psalms that were sung there. Neh. xii. 36 refers to "the musical instruments of David the man of God"; while Amos vi. 5 shows that much earlier than this David's musical instruments had become proverbial. It was not, however, a mere association of David's name with instruments of music, as many modern critics assert. The word used in 2 Sam. xxiii. 1 implies more than this, and the single illustration of the Lamentation in 2 Sam. i. is enough to prove that David was no mere skilled musical executant. The early character of the tradition which constituted him "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" has been shown, and by the time that Heb. iv. 7 was written, and indeed long before then, the whole Psalter was called after him and recognized by the simple name "David." Is it likely that he composed no sacred songs? If he did, is it likely that they all perished? The permanence of songs as literature is well known. The fragments contained in the early books of the Old Testament are an illustration of this. The care with which oral traditions of all kinds were handed on amongst the Jews and other Eastern nations is matter of history. But the memory is especially tenacious of poetry, of lyrical poetry more than of other kinds of verse, of sacred lyrics, especially when used in public worship and often repeated, most of all.[1]

3. It was the gracious thought of God to provide for His people a book of worship which should cultivate their personal association with Himself, and thus lift them out of sin and misery, and one that should abide through all time, more clearly understood and more highly prized with the advance of years. In order to accomplish this He first produced the men, appointed their circumstances of temptation and suffering, accompanied by such timely manifestations of His grace as should enable them to write psalms that would stir the hearts of men to their depths—psalms on the face of which genuineness should be inerasably stamped. David, the father of all who cultivated sacred song in Israel, He brought up from the pastures and sheepfolds, to wear a crown indeed, foreshadowing the Messiah, but to find no comfort or rest until he had been hunted like a wild beast through deserts and mountains, until he had passed through a furnace seven times heated in the treachery of his friends and the malignity of his enemies, until his own son, his pride and joy, had basely turned against him, and had driven him from his home and from the

[1] W. T. Davison, *The Praises of Israel*, 42.

altars of God, until his heart had been wrung by the untimely and violent death of that son, whom in all his wickedness he had loved more than his own life, until a combination of great powers had threatened to wipe him and his children off the face of the earth. David, the author of a number of these psalms, so suffered that he might initiate for the world this truly Divine book.

¶ The poets of Israel did not make their national heroes, however great, the subjects of their verse, or if they did, no works of this kind have come down to us. Designed to be the great teachers of a pure faith to men, chosen of God to speak His words, to utter the yearnings and the hopes of men's hearts towards Him, they were not suffered to forget this their higher vocation, or when they did, their words perished. Even the fame of Solomon could not secure for his thousand and five songs, which were probably merely of a secular kind, the meed of immortality. Hence it is that we have no Hebrew Poems on the life of David; and hence also it is that the perils and adventures through which he passed are not described in David's songs as they would have been by more modern poets. We are often at a loss to know to what particular parts of his history, to what turns and circumstances of his fortunes, this or that psalm is to be referred. Still it is impossible to read them and not to see that they are coloured by the reminiscences of his life.[1]

[1] Bishop Perowne, *The Psalms*, vol. i. p. xxi.

ABIGAIL.

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ABIGAIL.

The woman was of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance. —1 Sam. xxv. 3.

How admirable and wonderful is the skill of the Biblical narrative which in so brief a compass, by the slightest nail-impressions upon the plastic material, contrives to convey to us a complete portrait of this instructive character. Here is the plot of a fine romance —a story told in a few minutes, which an ingenious author might spin out with unflagging interest into a volume. Where writing is so condensed and significant, reading should be careful and meditative. For the writer trusts to the imagination and reflection of the reader to work out the hints that he has given. A wise Bible student will meditate upon the story and the persons, until all their detailed beauty, and all their implicit lessons, unfold themselves before him. Abigail is the most attractive woman in the histories of the Old Testament.

I.

The Story of Abigail.

1. The tidings passed throughout the land, like fire in prairie-grass, that Samuel was dead; and Israel, recognizing its unity in the common loss, gathered to lament the prophet and saint, and perform the last honouring rites. To his worth and service was accorded the unusual tribute of interment within the precincts of his own house at Ramah, on the heights of Benjamin. In all likelihood an amnesty was proclaimed, and David came to take part in the obsequies of his master and friend. He did not, however, dare to trust himself in such close proximity to Saul a moment longer than was absolutely essential; and as soon as all was over, he started again for the sparsely-populated region of Paran, at the

extreme south of Judah. To those border-lands, so long desolated by warfare through the incursion of the Philistines and Amalekites, his advent brought tranquillity and safety.

At the time of David's sojourn in this district, Nabal held his annual sheep-shearing. This was equivalent to the harvest of the flock-masters, and was commonly finished with a joyous feast which corresponded to the harvest-home. Generally, therefore, it was a season of liberality and goodwill. It was the yearly stock-taking time, and if things had turned out well, if the flocks had increased in number, and the fleeces were up to the average standard of weight and value, the heart of their owner was opened, and he was commonly disposed to show more than usual kindness to all who were in need. In the present instance, David knew that Nabal had peculiar reasons for being satisfied with the returns from his shepherds, for during the sojourn of his troop in the locality, he had constituted himself the guardian of Nabal's property, and, on the testimony of the shepherds, had not only not injured them himself, but had been a wall around them by night and day, so that neither were they injured by any one, nor had they missed anything all the time that David and his men had been beside them.

Where such services were accepted and counted upon, it was obviously fair, and indeed according to the custom of the time, that some recompense in kind should be made. It was a tacit understanding, an unwritten law; and David was perfectly justified in sending ten young men to greet the opulent sheep-master, Nabal, in the day of prosperity, to which the exertions of himself and his men had so largely contributed, to remind him of his obligations, and to ask whatsoever might come readily to his hand to give. The messengers departed without delay, and at length reached Carmel, and addressed to Nabal the words that had been given to them. But they were bitterly disappointed in their expectations. Nabal, a man "churlish and evil in his doings," as the narrative describes him, did not comply even so much as to return thanks for the friendly salutation which had been brought to him, but angrily, and with a stern countenance, said to the messengers, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants nowadays that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water,

and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?"

Stung to the quick by these aggravating words, the young men went to David, and told him how they had been repulsed. Very likely their story lost nothing in the telling. Most probably, indeed, they would infuse something of their own wounded pride into their account; but in any case, when David heard what they said, he became fiercely indignant, and, ordering four hundred of his men to arm themselves and follow him, he went forth, vowing the deepest vengeance, and determined not to leave a single survivor of all those who belonged to Nabal.

Thus he stands before us, about to break the peace of the land, to seize on the possessions of strangers, and to stain himself with the blood of peaceful citizens. If he had carried out what his anger suggested to him—and it was not his fault if the intention was never executed—he would have given the death-blow to his own honour and to his cause. Then he would have appeared before God and all the world as an outlaw, a man not only over whom his enemies would have triumphed, but who must also be given up by his friends as unworthy of the crown of Israel, and to whom nothing else would have remained but to beg for protection within the limits of some heathen land.

¶ When Mary Stuart in 1567 rode away a captive from Carbery Hill, she seized the hand of Lord Lindsay, her foe, and holding it aloft in her grasp, she swore by it, "I will have your head for this, so assure you."[1]

2. By the prompt and prudent management of Abigail, Nabal's wife, David was saved from carrying out his rash intention. It came about in this fashion: One of the shepherds, who knew how much they had all been indebted to David and his men, and who feared the consequences of Nabal's rudeness, went at once to Abigail, and stated the case to her. He did not take it upon him to expostulate with his master, for he knew that he was "such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." But he had confidence in the sagacity of his mistress, and he besought her to take measures immediately to ward off the evil which would be sure to come upon them all. His appeal was not made in vain,

[1] Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 93.

for she made haste, and laded asses with ample stores of provisions; and, sending these on before, she determined to go herself and make a full explanation and apology to David. As she was descending into a covert of the hill on the one side, David and his men were coming down on the other, "nursing their wrath" the while. As soon as she saw them she alighted from her ass, and, falling at David's feet, in Oriental fashion, she made suit to him in such a manner as to show a rare amount of womanly tact and intellectual ability. Taking all the blame upon herself, she referred to her husband with that union of playfulness and seriousness which, above all things, turns away wrath. "As his name is, so is he; Nabal (fool) is his name, and folly is with him." Then she proceeded, on the supposition that her request had been already granted, to congratulate David that the Lord had withholden him from shedding blood, and she begged his acceptance for his young men of the supplies which she had brought. Thereafter, rising from present circumstances, she went on to refer to the future in such a way as to show that she had implicit faith in the prophecies that had gone before concerning David; and in a manner the most delicately adroit she concluded by saying that, when God had given him the kingdom, it should be no grief to him that he had shed blood causelessly, or that he had avenged himself. All this was pertinently put; and when she spoke of God's making David "a sure house," of his soul as "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord his God," and of his enemies as destined to be slung out, "as out of the middle of a sling," we do not wonder that she gained her object. By the skilful allusion which she made to his revengeful purpose, she deeply touched the conscience of David, and turned his gratitude to her into thanksgiving to God.

Nabal, however, was not so well pleased with the result. When Abigail went home, she found him so intoxicated that she said nothing on the subject to him until the morning; but then, when he heard her report, he was so enraged at the loss of his property, or at the thought that his wife had done what he had himself refused to do, that he went into a fit of apoplexy—a disease to which his dissipated habits and the debauch of the previous night had predisposed him, and after lingering for ten days he died.

¶ George Eliot's strongest conviction, the keystone of her philosophy, was the idea that all our actions breed their due reward in this world, and that life is no reign of reason if we put off the compensation to another world. That is a moral far more easily worked in cases of outward, transitive sin than in those which disturb only the direct relations of man with God. These indeed are cases which may partly depend on our belief in God, not only in humanity and human character. Deny God, and whole branches of deeper morality lose their sanction. Her genius would no doubt reveal to her consequences which others cannot imagine. But still the inclination of a godless philosophy will be towards palpable effects and those about which there is no mistake. Especially in a doctrine with so little room for grace and forgiveness, where no God ever speaks except by the voice of other men. Defined and brought to book, that is a detestable system. But it is not on the surface—and many men can no more be kept straight by spiritual motives than we can live without policemen. Still there is a piece of truth in this paganism. Looking at history, not at biography, taking societies, and not individuals, we cannot deal with things seen by God alone; things take other proportions; the scale of vice and virtue is not that of private life; we judge of it by its outward action, and hesitate to penetrate the secrets of conscience. The law of visible retribution is false even there. But it is true that the test and measure of good and evil is not that of the spiritual biographer.[1]

> Let thy chief terror be of thine own soul:
> There, 'mid the throng of hurrying desires
> That trample o'er the dead to seize their spoil,
> Lurks vengeance, footless, irresistible
> As exhalations laden with slow death,
> And o'er the fairest troop of captured joys
> Breathes pallid pestilence.[2]

3. When David heard of the fate of Nabal, he was anew impelled to express his gratitude to God for having withheld him from the murder which it had been in his heart to commit. He sent messengers to Abigail, who were to speak to her, saying, "David sent us unto thee, to take thee to him to wife." Abigail, recognizing in this new incident of her life the guidance of a higher Hand, arose from her seat and bowed herself on her face

[1] *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone*, 96.
[2] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*.

to the earth before the messengers, as the representatives of David, and said, "Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord"—an expression of deep humility, arising from a true feeling of her unworthiness to be chosen as the spouse of him who would one day, as there was now no longer any room to doubt, be ruler over Israel. She ordered her mule to be saddled, and by no means concealing from herself the fact that she would encounter many hardships and trials she "went with five damsels of hers," along with the messengers of David, to the wilderness of Paran, and "she became David's wife."

¶ As the true gentleman never fails to make the best of his companions and of his surroundings, and when temptation, danger, or disappointment comes to himself or to his friends, keeps the child's heart in the brave man's breast; so the true gentlewoman, in all the alternations of life—elated by success or depressed by failure—will not be dazzled by the sunshine or dismayed by the storm. Who has not seen (as I in my long life have seen so often), to honour and to admire, the modest, grateful joy with which she has succeeded to honour and abundance, for which she never hoped. When weaker heads grow giddy, and when weaker hearts grow proud, she keeps the even tenor of her way, is not puffed up, does not behave herself unseemly. So with an equal grace and composure, whether by constraint or free will, she can take a lower place. There are women working in the slums of London, and in all the courts and alleys of our cities and towns, who were born and lived to womanhood in spacious homes, in the pure air of the country, with gardens, carriages, and servants, and all the comforts which money can buy—now wives of clergymen, deaconesses, sisters of mercy, district visitors. There is the tender, delicate woman, the emigrant's wife, doing the hardest and coarsest household work; and everywhere, here in England and six thousand miles away in South Africa, in homes, in hospitals, in tents, and on the battlefield, she is tending the wounded and the sick.[1]

II.

Abigail's Character.

The story of Abigail owes part of its charm to its unexpectedness. The marvel is to find a woman of Abigail's worth married to a boor like Nabal. Possibly she had very little to do with it.

[1] Dean Hole, *Then and Now*, 86.

In those early days, as in Eastern countries still, these things were arranged by the parents without consulting the children. And this was no doubt regarded as "a good match." Nabal was descended from the noble family of Caleb, and he was also a man of considerable wealth. Family and property—these were powerful factors in the marriage market, and covered a multitude of shortcomings. It is true, Nabal's reputation was not of the best; he was boorish, cowardly, and dissolute; but these were minor considerations, and, as in many a similar case since then, family and property carried the day. The very fact, however, that Abigail was the wife of Nabal serves to bring forth more strongly the beauty of her character. Four points are specially revealed in the narrative.

1. *Abigail was a woman of good understanding.*—The Abigail of whom we obtain so engaging a portrait is introduced to us as "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." After this passing remark, it is perhaps characteristic of the inspired writer that the narrative pays no further attention to the beauty of countenance, and does not even allow us to think that David was influenced in his wooing by the fairness of the face, but proceeds to illustrate in a tale of singular vividness and power the attraction of wisdom and mental ability in a woman. The prudence and address of Abigail saved the life of her worthless husband, and all the servants of his large establishment; and even ordinary women in everyday life do more than they know when they make peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

¶ Dr. Wilson's intense dislike of personal strife and unpleasantness often inclined him to give up his own rights in a way that suggested weakness. He chose to be the anvil rather than the hammer. By so doing he gained the blessedness of the peacemaker, and often his own wishes into the bargain.[1]

¶ There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered. Men, by their nature, are prone to fight; they will fight for any cause, or for none. It is for you to choose their cause for them, and to forbid them when there is no cause. There is no suffering, no injustice, no misery, in the

[1] James Wells, *The Life of James Hood Wilson*, 429.

earth, but the guilt of it lies with you. Men can bear the sight of it, but you should not be able to bear it. Men may tread it down without sympathy in their own struggle; but men are feeble in sympathy, and contracted in hope; it is you only who can feel the depths of pain, and conceive the way of its healing. Instead of trying to do this, you turn away from it; you shut yourselves within your park walls and garden gates; and you are content to know that there is beyond them a whole world in wilderness—a world of secrets which you dare not penetrate; and of suffering which you dare not conceive.[1]

2. *She was loyal.*—One might have thought that the prospect of condign punishment falling on the man whom she could never have loved, and from whom she had probably received nothing but contumely, would have been not unwelcome to Abigail, especially when he had brought it on himself, and she was entirely unconcerned in the matter. But that was not her way. She was loyal to her husband none the less because he deserved no loyalty. It might be impossible for her to love him or respect him, but she could defend him, and stand between him and his own folly. As soon as she met David she proceeded at once to confess the fault that had been committed, the fault for which she made herself responsible: "Upon me, my lord, upon me be the iniquity."

It has often been regarded as a flaw in Abigail's character that she did not defend her husband against the charge of folly, but rather suggested that to David as an excuse for what had happened. But her one chance of saving Nabal was to repudiate him, and to show how hateful his conduct seemed even to her, his wife. Let David dismiss him from his thought, fool by name, fool by nature, an utterly insignificant creature, not worthy of his regard. Let his eyes rest on her. It was with her that he had to do. And she, the house-mistress, had not seen the young men when they came, so that she had not immediately been able to attend to their request. As she spoke, she saw that she had arrested the hand of the avenger; his anger was subsiding; he was ready to listen and be convinced. Nabal and his people were saved.

¶ Erasmus tells us that no man ever had a bad wife but from his own fault, that a good wife may be spoilt by a bad husband

[1] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, § 91 (*Works*, xviii. 140).

but that a bad wife is usually reformed by a good one. I should be inclined to reverse this statement so far as to respectfully suggest the alteration that the husband is the one more frequently converted by the chaste conversation of the wife. Who has not seen the spendthrift reformed to economy, the "screw" to liberality, the sceptic to faith, by his wife? The wife is more calm, considerate, tender, and patient. If the man is opposed or offended, his counsel is for open war and vengeance; the woman will hear explanations, will offer or accept apologies. If a servant forgets to post a letter, the master promptly informs him that he takes precedence over all the asses in Europe; the mistress "knows that he is sorry to have forgotten the letter, and must ask him to walk with a telegram to the station, two miles from the house." She does not ridicule or vehemently condemn the first proposal of some thoughtless scheme; she does not retaliate the bitter words which have been uttered in an angry mood. She will only speak affectionately the argument which seems to her the simple truth and leave it, as she trusts, to germinate. For she learns to know her husband better than he knows himself, to discern the weakness and the strength; and so to lead him gently to the higher levels of his life.[1]

3. *She was tactful.*—Abigail is the ideal married woman of the Bible. Others had perhaps more heroic qualities, but she is the most essentially feminine of all the notable women of Scripture. She has what is possibly the most useful of all woman's gifts for life's common path. She has tact. There are but few women who are called, like Deborah, to lead their country's armies; or, like Jephthah's daughter, to die for their father's honour; but every one may imitate the womanly wisdom which is so conspicuous in the story of Abigail.

What is tact? It may be defined as that spiritual sensibility which instinctively knows not merely the right thing to say, but —what is much less common—when to say it and how to say it.

(1) Abigail possessed this quality in no ordinary degree. We see that suggested even by *her handling of her husband*, though in his case it seems to have been largely thrown away. Instead of attempting the apparently impossible task of bringing Nabal to a right way of thinking, she set off at once to meet David herself, and so protect her husband. Again, when she comes home and finds him intoxicated, she puts off her unpleasant news till the

[1] Dean Hole, *Then and Now*, 84.

morning. She does her best to spare her husband, and it is not her fault if the result is a failure.

(2) But still more do we see Abigail's tact in *her dealings with David.* If ever woman was placed in a difficult position Abigail was, with her foolish husband on the one side and the infuriated outlaw on the other. Yet she carries through her task successfully. Not only does she gain her request, but she touches at once the conscience and the heart of her enemy. It is hard to tell a man he is doing wrong and yet keep him from taking offence at you. Yet that was what Abigail did. Her religion and her faith stood her in good stead.

¶ The citizens of Glasgow always took a warm interest in the affairs of the training-ship *Cumberland* [which lay moored in the Clyde near Rosneath] and a grand annual entertainment was held on board, where the boys went through a number of exercises and displayed their various accomplishments, while their band played and a delighted audience of Glasgow and Gareloch spectators looked on, and some great lady afterwards presented prizes to such of the boys as had distinguished themselves. On one occasion the late philanthropist, Lord Shaftesbury, performed this duty, and horrified the audience by beginning his address to the boys in sonorous tones: "Boys of the *Cumberland*! you whom I may call the scum of the earth."[1]

¶ Many people with the very best motives and intentions, and with truly large capacity for doing good, almost utterly fail of usefulness and throw their lives away because they lack the gift of tact. They perform their kindest deeds in such a way as to rob them of nearly all their power to comfort or cheer. They speak the wrong word, giving pain when they wanted to give pleasure. They make allusions to themes on which no word should be spoken. They are ever touching sensitive spots. When they enter a home of sorrow, drawn by the truest sympathy, they are almost sure to make tender hearts bleed the more by some want of fitness in word or act. Others may not have one whit more desire to be useful. Yet because of their peculiar and gentle tact they scatter gladness all about them, and are ever performing sweet ministries of good. Their thoughtfulness seems intuitively to understand just what will be the best word to speak or the kindest and fittest thing to do. Tact has a wonderful power in smoothing out tangled affairs. In the home it is a most indispensable oil. Quiet tact will always have the

[1] J. L. Story, *Later Reminiscences*, 97.

soft word ready to speak in time to turn away anger. It knows how to avoid unsafe ground. It can put all parties into a good humour when there is a danger of difference or clashing. It is silent when silence is better than speech.[1]

4. *Abigail was the instrument of the Lord.*—The providence of God acts as a restraint on the wicked deeds of men; and in this case Abigail was instrumental in carrying out God's purposes, as the conclusion of the story shows.

(1) The power of sin was evidently held back by God. The ancient declaration, "I also withheld thee from sinning against me," was, as it were, repeated to David in the providential dealings of God that day when, with drawn sword uplifted, he sought to destroy the house of Nabal; and the means employed to stop him and turn him back from the path of wrong-doing was destined to be the prudent and energetic Abigail. She pointed first of all to the leadings of God, by which David had been kept from committing murder through her coming to meet him. "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, the Lord hath withholden thee from blood-guiltiness, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand."

¶ There is a saying that "if you wish to get to the sea, take a river for your guide." You may not see the sea for a long time, and the river may wind this way and that, but, if you follow it, it will be sure to bring you to the ocean at last.[2]

¶ From age to age, woman takes her place at the parting of temptation's ways, now urging on by way of the darker road, now with restraining hand holding back her wayward comrade. At one time she is Jezebel, or Lady Macbeth; at another time she is Abigail, or Pilate's wife. Now she incites the destroyer, now she encourages the deliverer. How many hands are stained because of her pride and also how many hands have been kept pure because of her goodness. Not only long ago may she have stood for the merciful restraints of Providence: but here to-day, in every national life, she may exercise her most womanly gifts to arrest the anger, the malice, the passion of revenge, from bursting into strife and war, from spreading havoc and ruin on fair spiritual growths![3]

(2) Abigail placed before David a high ideal for the future. By her promises of the rich blessings with which the Lord would

[1] J. R. Miller, *Week-Day Religion*, 162.
[2] J. S. Maver. [3] H. E. Lewis.

recompense David, she gave such clear and distinct expression to her firm belief in the Divine election of David as king of Israel that her words almost amounted to prophecy. "For the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord; and evil shall not be found in thee all thy days." Then followed the well-known words, full of deep meaning and pregnant with hope for the future: "The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." The metaphor is taken from the custom of binding up valuable things in a bundle to prevent their being injured. The words do not refer primarily to eternal life with God in heaven, but only to the safe preservation of the righteous on this earth in the grace and fellowship of the Lord. But whoever is so hidden in the gracious fellowship of the Lord in this life, that no enemy can harm him or injure his life, the Lord will not allow to perish, even though temporal death should come, but will then receive him into eternal life.

There was power in Abigail's argument derived from her appeal to David's sense of the wrong of revenge, and the assurance that his generous concern for his young men was now unnecessary. But that which evidently touched David most was her reference to his being the object of God's love and care. To be restrained by a loving God, to be in favour with Him amidst the wrongs of evil men, to have an interest in the higher spiritual life which is nourished and guarded by God, was more than all beside. How could one so richly and undeservedly blessed be revengeful or act in any way unworthy of the name of God? The Apostle adopts the same line of argument when he, enjoining a spirit of forgiveness, reminds his readers of the forgiveness they have received. If we would be humble, gentle, forgiving, and grateful, let us consider what it is to have our "names written in heaven" and to be the objects of a love from which nothing can separate us.

¶ Elsewhere I have spoken of the nations of Europe as a hundred million pagans masquerading as Christians. Not unfrequently in private intercourse I have found myself trying to convert Christians to Christianity, but have invariably failed. The truth is that priests and people alike, while taking their nominal creed from the New Testament, take their real creed

from Homer. Not Christ, but Achilles is their ideal. One day in the week they profess the creed of forgiveness, and six days in the week they inculcate and practise the creed of revenge. On Sunday they promise to love their neighbours as themselves, and on Monday treat with utter scorn any one who proposes to act out that promise in dealing with inferior peoples. Nay, they have even intensified the spirit of revenge inherited from barbarians. For, whereas the law between hostile tribes of savages is life for life, the law of the so-called civilized in dealing with savages is —for one life many lives. Not only do I feel perpetually angered by this hypocrisy which daily says one thing and does the opposite thing, but I also feel perpetually angered by it as being diametrically opposed to human progress; since all further advance depends on the decline of militancy and rise of industrialism. But what the great mass of the civilized peoples in their dealings with the uncivilized regard as glory I regard as shame.[1]

If thou be dead, forgive and thou shalt live;
  If thou hast sinned, forgive and be forgiven;
God waiteth to be gracious and forgive,
  And open heaven.

Set not thy will to die and not to live;
  Set not thy face as flint refusing heaven;
Thou fool, set not thy heart on hell: forgive
  And be forgiven.[2]

(3) If we blame David, as we must, for his heedless passion, we must not less admire the readiness with which he listened to the reasonable and pious counsel of Abigail. With the ready instinct of a gracious heart he recognized the hand of God in Abigail's coming—this mercy had a heavenly origin; and he cordially praised Him for His restraining providence and restraining grace. He candidly admitted that he had formed a very sinful purpose; but he frankly abandoned it, accepted her offering, and sent her away in peace. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me; and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." It is a mark of sincere and genuine godliness to be not less thankful for being kept from sinning than for being rescued from suffering.

[1] *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 400.
[2] C. G. Rossetti, *Verses*, 107.

¶ You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armour by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armour is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honour of manhood fails. Know you not those lovely lines —I would they were learned by all youthful ladies of England:

> Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
> On her sweet self set her own price,
> Knowing he cannot choose but pay,
> How has she cheapen'd Paradise;
> How given for nought her priceless gift,
> How spoiled the bread and spill'd the wine,
> Which, spent with due, respective thrift,
> Had made brutes men, and men divine![1]

(4) It was not long before David had convincing proof that it is best to leave vengeance in the hands of God. How frequently does this same providence of God appear surprising in its results. Injustice is always visibly requited still, and evil still works together with good. Early or later the Nabals receive their reward, even without the Davids requiring to become their own avengers; and the apparently fortuitous meeting with Abigail, to whose prudent counsel he gave heed, becomes immediately to the man after God's own heart a source of success in life. Thus God brings out of darkness light, out of sin a higher step of virtue, out of confusion order; and this is the masterpiece of His wisdom, that, without preventing evil by force, He leaves men relatively free, but not the less incessantly keeps back the sinner on his perverted way, and weaves our unconstrained action as a thread in the web of His scheme of the universe.

¶ Returning from a meeting on one occasion, James Taylor was accosted by a couple of men who appeared to be friendly. Engaged in conversation with one of them, he did not notice the movements of the other, who suddenly rubbed into his eyes a mixture of pounded glass and mud calculated to blind him for life. Sightless and in desperate pain Taylor was wholly at their mercy, and there is no knowing what might have happened had not Joseph Beckett, coming down Church Street at the time, hastened to his assistance. Seeing the magistrate the ruffians made off,

[1] Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, § 65 (*Works*, xviii. 120).

but not before Mr. Beckett had recognized one of them, a professed infidel and no friend to the Methodists in Barnsley. Poor Taylor was taken home in great suffering, and it was fully three months before he could return to work again. His employer urged him to take out a summons, having himself witnessed the occurrence. But James would not hear of it.

"No," he said, "the Lord is well able to deal with them. I would rather leave it in His hands."

This did not satisfy the magistrate, however, who decided to carry the prosecution through on his own account. In the witness-box the culprit denied the charge, calling upon God to strike him blind if he had anything to do with the outrage. Shortly after, all Barnsley knew that he had lost his sight. For the rest of his life he had to be led by a dog through the familiar streets, and ultimately sank into extreme poverty. His accomplice also was obliged to confess that nothing ever prospered with him from the time of their cruel attack upon James Taylor.[1]

[1] *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, 13.

JOAB.

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JOAB.

Joab the captain of the host.—1 Kings i. 19.

1. JOAB has been called the Douglas of the house of David. He was the staunch and skilful general, without whose aid the monarchy would not have been established. Had it not been for David, Joab would have climbed up into the throne of Israel. As it was, he stood on the steps of the throne and faced the king all his days. His position in the kingdom was second only to David, and even the king himself was afraid of his commander-in-chief.

2. Joab was David's sister's son, but was much of an age with David, and that, no doubt, helps to account for a good deal that went on between the uncle and the nephew. Joab was a stern, haughty, imperious, revengeful man—a man of strength, and a successful leader of armies. On the occasion of the conquest of the city of Jerusalem he was appointed by David to lead the army, and he displayed such bravery and such splendid gifts of leadership that he remained at the head of the armies of David for more than thirty years. He was a courageous man, and not only could fight himself, but could inspire others; and he possessed that dogged perseverance which never knows when it is beaten, but rises out of the ashes of defeat to fight once more and to conquer.

3. David's brothers never quite forgave him for being greater than themselves. Abner and the rest could not forget that scene in the vale of Succoth, when David by one supreme act of faith and courage became the nation's idol. Saul's was not the only heart which felt the pang of jealousy that day. But among those who stood staunch and true to David was his nephew, Joab. He was jealous and vindictive, but he was fiercely loyal to the

king, faithful always among the faithless. And David at the beginning of his reign thought much of his young kinsman, this brave, dashing soldier, who could always be depended upon to give a good account of himself. But Joab had the defects of his qualities: he was selfish, ambitious, with a nature of stone and iron; there was no light and shade in his character; he never suffered himself to be thwarted, but bore all down by the violence of his temper.

4. Joab had had unusual opportunities to become an intelligently religious man. He associated for three decades with King David, who, with all his follies and sins, was deeply religious. He was David's counsellor. He knew all that was in David's heart. No man could know David so intimately without being convinced of the intense sincerity of the man and of his true faith in God. Undoubtedly he often attended David in the worship of the sanctuary; but it had no influence upon him. For thirty years he lived close to David, knew of all the interposition of God's providence on behalf of his people, and yet his heart continued to grow hard and stubborn and cruel. His spirit became more vindictive as age crept on him. He became more revengeful, and, having the power, he used it for his own advancement. He lived a godless life despite godly examples and influences all around him.

I.

Joab and Abner.

The first mention of Joab is upon the occasion of the engagement at Gibeon between David's men and those of Ishbosheth. Abner, who commanded the latter, was completely beaten; but in the course of his retreat he killed Asahel, who had overtaken him. At sunset Joab, at the request of Abner, recalled his men from the pursuit, and returned to David's headquarters at Hebron. Some time afterwards Abner, having quarrelled with Ishbosheth, offered his allegiance to David. Joab was absent when Saul's general visited Hebron for this purpose, but returned shortly after his departure. Prompted by a desire to avenge the death of his

brother Asahel, and perhaps also by a jealous dread that Abner might supplant him in the favour of David, Joab sent messengers to recall him, and then treacherously murdered him.

This cold-blooded deed must be branded with the deepest condemnation; Joab violated what was equivalent to a flag of truce: and though some may remind us of the old law of blood-revenge, and affirm that under the Mosaic institutions, Joab, as the next-of-kin to Asahel, had a perfect right to do as he did, there are two things which go to bar this plea: Asahel was slain in battle, and Hebron was a city of refuge, in which Abner's life ought to have been respected, at least until he had been tried by the elders. Hence this act of Joab was not only cruelly treacherous but also a flagrant violation of the law of God. David was greatly afflicted by it, but instead of ordering Joab's immediate arrest and commanding justice to be done, he only said: "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the Lord reward the wicked doer according to his wickedness." David knew his duty quite well. But then Joab was the most powerful and the most necessary man in Israel, and Abner had no friends. David contented himself with pronouncing an eloquent requiem over Abner, leaving his murderer to go free in all his offices and all his honours. Joab was deep enough to understand why his life was spared. He knew that it was fear and not love that had moved David to let him live. It was a diplomatic act of David to spare Joab, but David was playing with a far deeper diplomatist than himself. Joab's impunity speedily shot up into an increased contempt for David, till in the end secret contempt became open insolence, and open insolence open and unavenged rebellion.

¶ In February 1834, Carlyle writes to his brother Alexander, "I will tell you a fault you have to guard against, and is not that the truest friendship that I can show you? Every position of man has its temptation, its evil tendency. Now yours and mine I suspect to be this: a tendency to imperiousness, to indignant self-help, and if nowise theoretical, yet practical, forgetfulness and tyrannical contempt of other men. This is wrong; this is *tyranny*, I say; and we ought to guard against it. Be merciful; repress much indignation; too much of it will get vent after all. Evil destiny is nothing; let it labour us and impoverish us as it will, if it only do not lame and distort us. Alas! I feel

well one cannot wholly help even this; but we ought unweariedly to endeavour."[1]

II.

Joab and Uriah.

1. Joab performed some splendid services, both as a soldier and as a statesman, in the extension and consolidation of David's kingdom. At the siege of Jerusalem by David it was Joab, according to the Chronicler, who first scaled the citadel, and thus earned the reward promised by the king, that he should be chief captain of the host. After the defeat of the Edomites Joab remained in Idumæa. For six months he employed himself in the savage work of exterminating the rock population. With a grim performance of duty, he buried the corpses of the dead, as fast as they fell, in the tombs of Petra. The terror of his name was so great that long afterwards nothing but the news of his death could encourage the exiled chief who had escaped from this eastern Glencoe to return to the haunts of his fathers.

2. One of Joab's most successful enterprises was the war against the allied forces of Syria and Ammon at Rabbath-Ammon. When at length the citadel was ready to fall, he displayed a combination of magnanimity and prudence in sending for David to deal the final blow, so that the king himself might have the credit of the victory.

It was while the siege of Rabbah was still in progress that David was guilty of the most heinous sin of his life. He saw and loved Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a Hittite soldier in his army. The lust of the eyes seized David, and, after having unsuccessfully attempted, in the meanest possible manner, to use Uriah himself for the purpose of hiding the consequences of his iniquity, David wrote that diabolical letter to Joab, which, though it was virtually Uriah's death-warrant, he asked the victim to deliver with his own hand: "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die." It was an order which an unscrupulous man like Joab was only too

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1835*, ii. 412.

ready to execute. An assault was made on Rabbath-Ammon, and Uriah was slain.

Such a treacherous act put David more completely still in the power of the unscrupulous Joab. He exhibited all the characteristics of a privileged bully, he set at defiance the king's commandment, and was master of the situation; his shadow was always behind the throne. Joab had no more pity than a tiger, and the tiger's claws were never out of David's flesh from the matter of Uriah down to David's death.

¶ To many the bearing of Joab toward the authority of David may be an enigma. But that which made Joab so terrible an example of unsanctified power was his possession of the dreadful secret of Uriah's death. He knew too much of David's guilt; and so all his great natural abilities were concentrated in holding a firm grip on the king's public reputation. It is true, David had found forgiveness with God, and was a new man; but he knew that Joab had him in his power in matters that came nearest to a man's life, and Joab perfectly understood that David dared not do what otherwise he would doubtless have done. This possession of secret knowledge concerning others always gives increased power. Whoever knows of the financial weakness of a commercial firm, or the private delinquencies of individuals, or of original social inferiority of persons aiming to figure in society, if it be known that he knows, holds a power over these parties which they dread, and which, if he be unholy, he can use in most painful form. Those are to be pitied indeed who have caused their failings and sins to become the secret of unholy men.[1]

III.

Joab and Absalom.

1. David's favourite son, Absalom, was a fugitive on account of the murder of his brother; and David mourned in his palace both the absence of his heir and the wretched circumstances which had stained the record of his family. The young man Absalom had been guilty of a crime which was condemned even by the wild justice of those early times. Three years had elapsed since the lawless prince had fled the kingdom, and day by day the old king was eating his heart out in the deserted palace at Jerusalem. No

[1] C. Chapman.

doubt he played the moral parent till life at court became a burden to all his ministers. He longed to have his favourite back again. He was ready in his heart to excuse the young man's sin, but felt it to be his duty sternly to condemn that sin. At this juncture the brave but unscrupulous Joab determined to persuade the king to gratify his own inclinations.

Joab prepared, in Oriental fashion, a trap for the king, to shame him into a reconciliation. "A wise woman" from Tekoa was introduced into the king's presence with a made-up story, that she was a widow with two sons. One had slain the other, and now the relations wished to kill the murderer, and so leave the mother desolate. She won from the king the promise that the life of her surviving son should be spared; and then, turning on the king, accused him of being more cruel to his own family than he had shown himself to hers. The pathetic plea of this woman made David feel that there are times when mercy has a better claim than justice, and that even God Himself did not exact vengeance to the full from His own frail creatures: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God take away life, but deviseth means, that he that is banished be not an outcast from him" (2 Sam. xiv. 14). The king recognized, and made the woman confess, that she was but speaking at the instigation of Joab, but he relented sufficiently to send Joab to Geshur with the message that Absalom might return, but not see his father.

2. For two years father and son lived together in Jerusalem without any intercourse. This was very disagreeable to the young man. He felt that he might just as well have stayed three hundred miles away. So as he had well served his turn before, Absalom resolved to bring Joab to his help again, and get him to intercede with the king for a full and immediate reconciliation. Joab may have been doing his best for Absalom, or he may not. In any case he did not move fast enough for the imperious young prince. He sent for Joab therefore; but Joab, having no good tidings to give him, would not come. He sent a second time, and still Joab would not come. Whereupon he sent servants into Joab's farm to fire his standing barley, and so compel the old captain to wait on him and to act again as mediator. Joab did so,

and succeeded in bringing the king and his son together—Absalom "bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom."

¶ It is difficult, at first sight, to account for the conduct of Joab here; for, after he had earnestly exerted himself to procure Absalom's recall, it appears strange that he should have been so indifferent to the position which the young man was made by his father to occupy. But we find the explanation in the fact that in this, as in all other things, the crafty and unscrupulous warrior was seeking only to promote his own interests. He had obtained a great ascendancy over David by his complicity in the murder of Uriah, and by making the monarch believe that he was indispensable to him. Now he desired to gain a similar power over Absalom. This, however, could be done only by laying him under some great obligation. Hence he probably kept away from the young man, with the view of getting him to come humbly to him as a suppliant, asking the favour of his intercession with the king. But the burning of his field let him see that Absalom was made of sterner stuff; and so, in order that he might not provoke his vengeance, he was led to do for him, by a sort of compulsion, that which he had intended to do only when he was urgently entreated for it as for a great kindness.[1]

3. At the critical moment when Absalom's rebellion broke out, Joab saved the situation by siding with David and refusing to swerve from his chief. He remained true to the aged monarch, but he had his price. David had given express command to Joab that Absalom was to be spared: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." But Joab cared little for David's injunction. When, after the battle, the proud young prince was found hanging by his head in an oak, Joab, on learning the news, hastened not to take him prisoner but to thrust three darts into Absalom's body, leaving his armour-bearers to finish the work.

¶ I was very much beaten and overtired yesterday, chiefly owing to a week of black fog, spent in looking over a work of days and people long since dead; and my "text" this morning was "Deal courageously, and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." It sounds a very saintly, submissive, and useful piece of advice; but I was not quite sure who gave it; and it was evidently desirable to ascertain that. For, indeed, it chances to

[1] W. M. Taylor, *David, King of Israel*, 236.

be given, not by a saint at all, but by quite one of the most self-filled people on record in any history—about the last in the world to let the Lord do that which seemed Him good, if he could help it, unless it seemed just as good to himself also—Joab, the son of Zeruiah. The son, to wit, of David's elder sister; who, finding that it seemed good to the Lord to advance the son of David's younger sister to a place of equal power with himself, unhesitatingly smites his thriving young cousin under the fifth rib, while pretending to kiss him, and leaves him wallowing in blood in the midst of the highway. But we have no record of the pious or resigned expressions he made use of on that occasion.[1]

4. The passionate grief of David over Absalom changed the glory of victory into gloom, and so affected his troops as they returned to Mahanaim that "they gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle." Joab roughly aroused his master from his despondency in words which reveal both the sound policy and the unsympathetic nature of this great captain: "Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry a man with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that hath befallen thee from thy youth until now." Something like this needed to be said; but perhaps Joab was not the man to say it in the most tender and considerate manner. For Joab could touch nothing with a velvet hand. Rough, violent, and callous himself, he could not understand the sensitiveness of another; hence, while doing a very proper thing, he did it in so harsh and dictatorial a manner that the king, even while yielding to his entreaty, chafed more than ever under the yoke of Zeruiah's sons, and registered a resolution to free himself from their domination as soon as it might be practicable. He could not forgive Joab for the murder of Absalom; he proceeded to depose him from his office of "captain of the host," and actually appointed Amasa, his nephew, Absalom's own commander, to take Joab's place.

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, Letter 40 (*Works*, xxviii. 70).

IV.

Joab and Amasa.

Scarcely had Absalom's rebellion against his father, King David, been quelled, when another and more serious defection broke out. The occasion was the loyal emulation of the northern and southern tribes in the great assembly gathered at Gilgal for the return of the king. The spark of rebellion was kindled by a Benjamite, Sheba, the son of Bichri, described as a "man of Belial" (a person of worthless character). He blew a trumpet, and raised the cry, "We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse." The ten tribes followed the new rebel, and the first work of David, when he arrived at Jerusalem, was to send his own bodyguard and the picked men of his army, under Amasa's command, in pursuit of Sheba. But whether that officer, so recently in rebellion against David, had not yet gained the confidence of the king's forces, or whether he was secretly in sympathy with Sheba's revolt, does not appear. In any case, he tarried longer than the time appointed; and David, fearing that the rebellion might become even more formidable than Absalom's, commissioned Abishai to head his troops, and pursue Sheba before he could intrench himself within a walled city. It is observable that all through this affair there is a studied slight of Joab; yet that able if unscrupulous leader saw his opportunity; for, taking rank under his brother, he went out along with the king's troops.

At the "great stone" in Gibeon the cousins met. Amasa rushed into the treacherous embrace to which Joab invited him, and Joab, with the same sudden stroke as had dealt the death-wound of Abner, plunged his sword, which, whether by design or accident, fell out of its sheath, deep into Amasa's bowels. Amasa fell; Joab and Abishai hurried on in the pursuit of the rebels. The dead body lay soaking in a pool of blood by the road-side. As the army came up, every one halted at the ghastly sight, till the attendant whom Joab had left dragged it aside, and threw a cloth over it. Then, as if the spell were broken, they followed Joab, now once more captain of the host. He prosecuted the campaign with vigour, and speedily brought it to a successful

issue. Sheba having taken refuge at Abel-beth-maacah, Joab laid siege to the town, and only desisted when the head of the rebel was cast to him over the wall.

¶ I have repeatedly ridden round Abel of Beth-Maacah, and stood on the top of the long oval mound on which the town is situated, trying to realize the scene of its siege by Joab and his army. Taking advantage of an oblong knoll of natural rock that rises above the surrounding plain, the original inhabitants raised a high mound sufficiently large for their city. With a deep "trench" and strong wall, it must have been impregnable. The country on every side is most lovely, well watered, and very fertile. The Derdâra, from Ijon, falls from that plain by a succession of cataracts, and glides swiftly along the western declivity of the mound, and from the neighbouring mountain gushes out the powerful stream of Ruahiny. Such fountains and brooks would convert any part of this country into a paradise of fruits and flowers; and such, no doubt, was Abel, when it was called "a mother in Israel." But the hoof of war tramples all in the dust. Abel itself is a sad example of the utter decay and ruin that has "swallowed up the inheritance of the Lord." The present village, far from being a mother in Israel, occupies only a small portion of the mound; and wisdom and counsel will be sought in vain at the hands of the peasants who lounge in rags and filth upon the dunghills which barricade their streets and doors.[1]

V.

Joab and Solomon.

1. When Adonijah, in David's extreme old age, took steps to have himself proclaimed king, Joab attached himself to his party. The old age of David is not a lovely spectacle, and Solomon inherited some of his father's least admirable traits. Joab, in the last phase or dotage of David, can hardly have found much to command his hero-worship, and this may explain in part his unaccountable lapse from loyalty. He had been steadily drifting away from David for years. His fierce temper could not brook the king's displeasure on account of the murders of Abner and Amasa, and his slaying of Absalom had made the breach irreparable. No doubt David had made him feel that he loved and

[1] W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 195.

trusted him no longer; and his old comrade in many a fight, Benaiah, had stepped into the place which he himself had once filled. Joab had more than one deep resentment brooding in his breast, and there is something mournful in the sigh that the sacred historian heaves over the events which, at the close of his long life, at last broke the unshaken loyalty of the venerable soldier. "For Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom."

¶ Great masses, who knew Napoleon only in his public capacity, chiefly as a general, adored him to the last. The private soldiers who marched from France to Waterloo were inspired with an enthusiasm for him which at least equalled that of the soldiers at Marengo or Austerlitz. But that enthusiasm diminished in proportion to remoteness from the rank and file. Officers felt it less in an ascending scale, and when the summit was reached it was no longer perceptible. Berthier, his lifelong comrade, the messmate of his campaigns, his confidant, deserted him without a word, and did not blush to become captain of Louis XVIII.'s body-guard. His marshals, the companions of his victories, all left him at Fountainbleau, some with contumely. Ney insulted him in 1814, Davoust in 1815. Marmont, the petted child of his favour, conspicuously betrayed him. The loyal Caulaincourt found a limit to his devotion at last. Even his body attendants, Constant and Rustan, the valet who always tended him, and the Mameluke who slept against his door, abandoned him. It was difficult to collect a handful of officers to accompany him to Elba, much more difficult to find a few for St. Helena.[1]

2. Solomon, upon his accession to the throne, considered it prudent to rid himself of Joab, whose influence with the army might have constituted a serious danger to the new monarch. No doubt a desire to wipe away from his house the stain of the unavenged blood of Abner and Amasa partly influenced Solomon, but State reasons must have predominated. Joab, on hearing that Adonijah had been put to death and Abiathar deposed, needed no further intimation that his own life was in danger, and he fled to the asylum of the altar. It was the hour of his desperation; the pressure of destiny was upon his heart, the hand of retribution had laid hold upon him; and rather than die like Judas, he would lay hold upon the horns of the altar as his only means

[1] Lord Rosebery, *Napoleon: the Last Phase*, 250.

of salvation. But he had no right to do so. He was one of those expressly forbidden by the law of Moses (Deut. xix. 12) to enter the tabernacle, or to lay hold upon the horns of the altar. As a murderer—as a murderer "with guile," as a murderer with deliberate purpose—he had no right to take refuge in God's sanctuary, or to lay hold upon the altar with his defiled hands. As far as we can judge, he had shown little respect to religion during his lifetime. He was a rough man of war, and cared little about God, or the tabernacle, or the priests, or the altar; but when he was in danger, he fled to that which he had avoided, and sought to make a refuge of that which he had neglected.

¶ Nemesis is lame, but she is of colossal stature, like the gods; and sometimes, while her sword is not yet unsheathed, she stretches out her huge left arm and grasps her victim. The mighty hand is visible, but the victim totters under the dire clutch.[1]

3. The same disregard of ceremonial sanctity as Solomon had shown in deposing the venerable Abiathar he now showed by deciding that even the sacredness of the altar was not to protect the man who had reeked with the blood of Abner and Amasa; and accordingly the white-headed warrior of a hundred fights, with his hands still clasping the consecrated structure, was slain by the hands of his ancient comrade Benaiah, whose readiness to act as executioner was doubtless all the greater because he thus secured the reversion of the office of commander-in-chief for himself. The body was buried in funeral state at Joab's own property in the hills overhanging the Jordan valley.

¶ According to 1 Kings ii. 1–12, Solomon, in the execution of Joab, acted in obedience to the dying injunction of David. Wellhausen and Stade hold, however, that this passage is an unhistorical interpolation. The hand of the Deuteronomic redactor is certainly evident in ver. 3, but Budde, following Kuenen, defends the antiquity (without committing himself to the historicity) of at least vv. 5–9.

4. Joab died hated because he was a cruel, relentless man, and knew not what mercy was until he called for it himself—in vain. He never knew the greatness of gentleness, the hallowedness of

[1] George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

failure; his life was an almost uninterrupted success, which is perhaps the worst thing that can happen to any man. And he did not mellow with the years, as some do, and as all should, but continued self-opinionated, dogmatic, and overbearing to the last; the hot, fierce noon of life had no soft gloaming, full of half-lights and shadows, but the sun was suddenly blotted out by midnight darkness. The land trembles as Joab rises on the stepping-stones of murdered men to the shining top of power and honour, only to fall under the sword of a too slow justice, an outlaw from the love and the pity of all men. When the curtain fell, there was no eye to pity, no tears were shed; there was only a sigh of relief that there was one tyrant less; for the world can get on better without its Joabs than with them.

¶ Viewed as a strictly judicial proceeding, the trial of Strafford was as hollow as the yet more memorable trial in the same historic hall eight years later. Oliver St. John, in arguing the attainder before the Lords, put the real point. "Why should he have law himself who would not that others should have any? We indeed give laws to hares and deer, because they are beasts of chase; but we give none to wolves and foxes, but knock them on the head wherever they are found, because they are beasts of prey." This was the whole issue—not law, but *My head or thy head.* "Put not your trust in princes," exclaimed Strafford when he learned the facts. "I dare look death in the face," he said stoically, as he passed out of the Tower gate to the block; "I thank God I am not afraid of death, but do as cheerfully put off my doublet at this time as ever I did when I went to my bed." "His mishaps," said his confederate, Laud, "were that he groaned under the public envy of the nobles, and served a mild and gracious prince who knew not how to be nor to be made great."[1]

5. Great as were his crimes, Joab had been a faithful friend to David. He had evidently made the Judæan monarchy secure, and had saved David's throne in two great emergencies. There is no doubt that his character has often been unfairly estimated, either from lack of a due regard to the spirit of the age in which he lived, or from prejudice in favour of David and Solomon. The least that can be said is that he was a man of far-seeing, statesman-like views, a brave soldier, a skilful commander, and a loyal subject. The Oriental is not usually distinguished for generosity to

[1] Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 88.

his enemies or scrupulousness in his methods of revenge, and Joab was no exception to this rule; but, taking everything into account, we feel that this great man deserved a better fate, and it leaves a painful impression upon us when we learn that, after he had served his king and his country so faithfully, his grey hairs were not suffered to go down to the grave in peace.

¶ No one can confidently say whether an early death is a misfortune, for no one can really know what calamities would have befallen the dead man if his life had been prolonged. How often does it happen that the children of a dead parent do things or suffer things which would have broken his heart if he had lived to see them! How often do painful diseases lurk in germ in the body which would have produced unspeakable misery, if an early and perhaps a painless death had not anticipated their development! How often do mistakes and misfortunes cloud the evening and mar the beauty of a noble life, or mortal infirmities, unperceived in youth or early manhood break out before the day is over! Who is there who has not often said to himself as he looked back on a completed life, how much happier it would have been had it ended sooner? "Give us timely death" is in truth one of the best prayers that man can pray.[1]

¶ Seneca says that death ought not to be considered an evil when it has been preceded by a good life. What makes death so formidable is that which follows upon it. We have, however, the shield of a most blessed hope to protect us against the terrors that arise from fear of the Divine judgments. This hope makes us put our trust, not in our own virtue, but solely in the mercy of God, and assures us that those who trust in His goodness are never confounded. But you say, "I have committed many faults." True, but who is so foolish as to think that he can commit more sins than God can pardon? Who would dare to compare the greatness of his guilt with the immensity of that infinite mercy which drowns his sins in the depths of the sea of oblivion each time we repent of them for love of Him? It belongs only to those who despair like Cain to say that their sin is so great that there is no pardon for them, for with God there is mercy and plentiful redemption, and He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.[2]

[1] W. E. H. Lecky, *The Map of Life*, 349.
[2] *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, 348.

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ABSALOM.

And the king said unto the Cushite, Is it well with the young man Absalom? And the Cushite answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! —2 Sam. xviii. 32, 33.

ABSALOM was of royal descent on both sides, for his mother was a king's daughter. He was undoubted heir to the throne, and the favourite, even the idol, of his father. He was gifted with graces of person so extraordinary that he had won the admiration of all Israel: and even the sacred writer is almost betrayed into raptures in describing it: "From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." He had the commanding presence, the natural dignity, the boldness in enterprise, and the fearlessness in danger which give a man sway over his fellow-men. And he was not without mental endowments of a distinguished kind. Great was that charm of eloquence and persuasiveness which won the hearts of all Israel, which made the wronged believe that in him they would have a defender, and the oppressed to see in him their God-sent judge and champion. He knew well how to play on the weaknesses and prejudices and susceptible emotions of men. What cleverness it needed to sit at the gates of the city and give answer to all appeals, and settle disputes, and gratify every suppliant, and do it all with so much grace and apparent disinterestedness that he made everybody feel that he was their best friend. What ability too, almost genius indeed, was required to organize that great rebellion, and to carry it forward in the face of immense difficulties to the verge of success. There was everything in the man's favour. He seemed to be one of Heaven's favourites, elected to fill a foremost position, and leave a great name in history—endowed with every

grace except that grace which we call the grace of God. And all that came of it was a brief, comet-like career, full of folly and mischief and cruelty, which ended in a shameful death and a dishonoured grave, and which was lamented by none except the father whom he had most grievously wronged.

I.

The Family of David.

1. A large portion of the Book of Samuel is devoted not to the glories, but to the disasters, of David's reign. As a soldier he seems to have enjoyed almost uninterrupted success; but as a monarch, especially in his own family, David had but little happiness. His kingdom was now secure from the pressure of external enemies, but new dangers threatened it from within. Troubles arose in the king's family—troubles which were unhappily due to David's own sin and weakness. He, like other Oriental despots, had gradually gathered round him a numerous harem, thereby introducing into his capital the usual abuses of an Eastern court. He had at least seven wives, who, with their children, lived each in a separate establishment of her own. The princes, whether the cousins or sons of the king, dwelt near, each with his royal mule. The princesses, as they moved to and fro among their companions, were distinguished by the long sleeves of their robes.

The eldest born was Amnon, the son of Ahinoam, whom, as the heir to the throne, the king cherished with a regard amounting almost to awe. His intimate friend in the family was his cousin Jonadab, one of those characters who in great houses pride themselves on being acquainted with all the secrets of the family. This was one group in the royal circle. Another consisted of the two children of Maacah, the Princess of Geshur—Absalom and his sister Tamar, the only children of purely royal descent. In them the beauty for which the house of Jesse was renowned—David's brothers, David himself, Adonijah, Solomon—seemed to be concentrated. Absalom especially was in this respect the very flower and pride of the whole nation. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish

in him." The magnificence of his hair was something wonderful. Year by year or month by month its weight was known and counted. He had a sheep-farm near Ephraim or Ephron, a few miles to the north-east of Jerusalem, and another property near the Jordan valley, where he had erected a monument to keep alive the remembrance of his name. He had, however, one daughter, who afterwards carried on the royal line in her child, called, after her grandmother, Maacah, and destined to play a conspicuous part in the history of the divided kingdom. This daughter was named Tamar, after her aunt. The elder Tamar, like her brother and her niece, was remarkable for her extraordinary beauty, whence perhaps she derived her name, "the palm-tree," the most graceful of Oriental trees. For this, and for the homely art of making a peculiar kind of cake, the princess had acquired a renown which reached beyond the seclusion of her brother's house to all the circle of the royal family.

2. Luxury and self-indulgence lured David on to the commission of a terrible crime. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, an officer in his army, and to conceal his guilt procured the death of her husband. Though the repentance of the king, when he was denounced by the prophet Nathan, was deep and sincere, the long train of miseries which resulted from David's evil example forms a kind of Divine commentary on the heinous character of his crime. When we hear the narrator describe the way in which this evil deed produced evil fruit in David's household, it is as though we were witnessing a Greek tragedy enacted before our eyes. Crime was heaped on crime, as if in obedience to an awful destiny. The father had begun with open adultery, and had then endeavoured to veil his guilt with hypocrisy and to cover it with blood. He need not be surprised if his children did not shrink from rape, if not incest, and were led on to murder and destruction.

¶ It is not retribution that establishes the moral law, but the moral law that establishes retribution. The shadow falls not *backward* from that world to this, but forward from this world to that. It is our nature and our conscience that demand and must determine our future lot; not our future lot that is to create our conscience and regulate our nature.[1]

[1] James Martineau.

3. Brought up in an evil atmosphere, David's sons leave a record of nothing but evil. To the impurity, violence and guile of an Eastern court was superadded the criminally foolish indulgence of their father. Besides, we may well believe that the great sins which David had committed became known to his subjects and his household; the king's authority and influence for good would be impaired to such an extent that he would be compelled to gaze in helpless anguish on the vice and misery his own sins had caused. We cannot wonder that the sons of David went astray, brought up as they were amid the temptations of an Eastern court, unchecked and unrestrained—and, alas! with their father's own example to point to in defence of their crimes.

¶ The following is a description, taken from the Chinese classic called *The Great Learning*, of the means adopted by the ancient princes for promoting virtue throughout the Empire. "With this object they were careful to govern well their own States. In order to govern well their States, they first regulated their own families. In order to regulate their families, they first practised virtue in their own persons. In order to arrive at the practice of virtue, they first rectified their hearts. In order to rectify their hearts, they first sought for sincerity of thought. In order to obtain sincerity of thought, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. The extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things."[1]

II.

Absalom before the Rebellion.

1. Absalom first comes into prominence in connexion with the story of his sister Tamar. The tragedy of David's passion repeated itself in Amnon, who, aided by his cunning cousin, violated his half-sister Tamar—a folly unworthy of an Israelite—and then sent her cruelly away. David, though exceedingly angry, was loth to grieve his firstborn son by harsh measures. Absalom, however, Tamar's full brother, nursed hopes of vengeance for two long years, and finally, at a sheep-shearing festival to which he had invited all the king's sons, had Amnon slain, to the intense grief of David; for thus he lost not only his firstborn son, but also his darling Absalom, who fled to his royal grandfather, whose kingdom lay to the north-east of Israel.

[1] James Legge, *Chinese Classics*, i. 357.

It is not easy to paint the blackness of the crime of Absalom. We have nothing to say for Amnon, who seems to have been a man singularly vile; but there is something very appalling in his being murdered by the order of his brother, something very cold-blooded in Absalom's appeal to the assassins not to flinch from their task, something very revolting in the flagrant violation of the laws of hospitality, and something not less daring in the deed being done in the midst of the feast, and in the presence of the guests. When Shakespeare would paint the murder of a royal guest, the deed is done in the dead of night, with no living eye to witness it, with no living arm at hand capable of arresting the murderous weapon. But here is a murderer of his guest who does not scruple to have the deed done in broad daylight in presence of all his guests, in presence of all the brothers of his victim, while the walls resound to the voice of mirth, and each face is radiant with festive excitement. Out from some place of concealment rush the assassins with their deadly weapons; next moment the life-blood of Amnon spurts on the table, and his lifeless body falls heavily to the ground. Before the excitement and horror of the assembled guests have subsided, Absalom has made his escape, and before any step can be taken to pursue him he is beyond reach in Geshur.

In this assassination of Amnon, David could not but see the further just retaliation of Providence for his own aggravated sin in the murder of Uriah, and the recollection of it must have greatly enhanced the bitterness of his grief, opened afresh the wounds of his conscience, renewed his repentance before his offended God, and caused him to deprecate the further effects of His displeasure.

¶ Verily these your deeds will be brought back to you, as if you yourself were the creator of your own punishment.[1]

¶ The story of *Adam Bede* is a tragedy arising from the inexorable consequences of human deeds. It will be remembered that it was Charles Bray who first set George Eliot meditating on the law of consequences. Sara Hennell had thought much about it too. She wrote in *Christianity and Infidelity*: "When the law of moral consequences is recognized as fixed and absolute, the hope to escape from it would be as great madness as to resist the law of gravitation." George Eliot's best known expression of this law is in *Romola*: "Our deeds are like our children that are born to us;

[1] *The Sayings of Muhammad* (trans. by Al-Suhrawardy), 33.

they live and act apart from our own will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never; they have an indestructible life both in and out of our own consciousness." This is the old Buddhist doctrine of Karma. St. Paul had put it still more briefly: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This law was not fatal to St. Paul, because he believed in regeneration. George Eliot followed Charles Bray. For him, the responsible person was he who, recognizing the inexorable consequences, governed himself accordingly. Nemesis was George Eliot's watchword, but in her handling of this law she approached to the Greek Fate rather than to St. Paul. It is this Fate which makes much of the extraordinary impressiveness of the *Mill on the Floss*. And in *Adam Bede*, Arthur Donnithorne's sin brought its retribution of terrible suffering not only to himself, but to Hetty, to Adam, to the Poysers. "There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up," are the words wrung from him after bitter experience.[1]

2. Great as Absalom's crime had been, we can readily understand that popular sympathy would in large measure be on the side of the princely offender. And David's heart soon turned to him also. Joab accordingly set about effecting Absalom's return. He sent to the king a wise woman of Tekoa with a feigned tale of the risk of death to which her firstborn son was exposed by the clan law of blood-revenge—a tale which moved the king to a solemn oath to save her son from the avengers. Why then—she went on with a compliment to the king's discernment—why then will he not save his son by recalling him from banishment, as Amnon is dead and nothing can bring him back again? The shrewd king rightly suspected that Joab was behind the woman's word; and, sending for him, he gave him leave to bring Absalom back, which he gratefully did. But Absalom was not suffered to see the king's face for two whole years, when at last, by a bold stroke, he prevailed upon the reluctant Joab to intercede for him. The king then gave his son the kiss of reconciliation.

3. The prince, seeing himself restored to favour and his eldest brother removed by death, now began to cherish ambitious schemes. The son of a foreign princess, and enjoying the popularity which often follows great personal attractions, he proceeded to add to it by sympathizing with all suitors whose efforts to

[1] C. Gardner, *The Inner Life of George Eliot*, 117.

obtain justice met with delay, consequent upon the king's failing to appoint the necessary deputies to aid him in his judicial functions. His hints of the beneficent change which would ensue if he were judge, and his grace and courtesy towards every one who approached to make obeisance to him, won all hearts; and he soon assumed something like royal state.

How well Absalom learned the arts of the office-seeker! Along with his handsome equipage he showed admirable devotion to the interests of his "constituents." He was early at the gate, so great was his appetite for work; he was accessible to everybody; he flattered each with the assurance that his case was clear; he gently dropped hints of sad negligence in high quarters, which *he* could so soon set right, if only he were in power; and he would not have the respectful salutation of inferiors, but grasped every hard hand, and kissed each tanned cheek, with an affectation of equality very soothing to the dupes. There was, no doubt, truth in the charge he made against David of negligence in his judicial and other duties. Ever since his great sin, the king seems to have been stunned into inaction. If we suppose that he was much in the seclusion of his palace, a heavily-burdened and spirit-broken man, we can understand how his condition tempted his heartless, dashing son to grasp at the reins which seemed to be dropping from his father's slack hands, and how David's passivity gave opportunity for Absalom's carrying on his schemes undisturbed, and a colour of reasonableness to his charges. For four years this went on unchecked, and apparently unsuspected, by the king, who must have been much withdrawn from public life not to have taken alarm. Having in these four years thoroughly equipped himself, Absalom proceeded to proclaim open revolt against the unsuspecting king.

> Being once perfected how to grant suits,
> How to deny them, who to advance and who
> To trash for over-topping, new created
> The creatures that were mine, I say, or changed 'em,
> Or else new form'd 'em; having both the key
> Of officer and office, set all hearts i' the state
> To what tune pleased his ear; that now he was
> The ivy which had hid my princely trunk,
> And suck'd my verdure out on't. . . .

> And my trust,
> Like a good parent, did beget of him
> A falsehood in its contrary as great
> As my trust was; which had indeed no limit,
> A confidence sans bound. He being thus lorded,
> Not only with what my revenue yielded,
> But what my power might else exact, like one
> Who having into truth, by telling of it,
> Made such a sinner of his memory,
> To credit his own lie, he did believe
> He was indeed the duke.[1]

III.

The Rebellion and the End.

Although the revolt of Absalom, which so nearly ended in the overthrow of David, is related in detail, it is not easily understood. It is evident that Absalom possessed personal attractions and those popular gifts which make the leader of an insurrection doubly formidable, while David seems by this time to have lost the vigour and resolution of his youth, his whole conduct being marked by feebleness, in strong contrast to the energy and prudence displayed by him in the early days of his reign.

1. The place chosen for the rising was Hebron, both on account of the facilities it offered for retreat in case of failure, and as the city where formerly a new royalty had been instituted by David himself; perhaps also as the birthplace of Absalom, and, as has been suggested, because the transference of the royal residence to Jerusalem may have left dissatisfaction in Hebron. Absalom obtained the king's permission to go thither, on pretence of paying a vow made at Geshur. It was a clever device for entrapping two hundred influential persons from Jerusalem to invite them to accompany him, on pretext of taking part in the sacrificial feast. When they arrived at Hebron, the mask was thrown off, and the conspiracy rapidly assumed most formidable proportions.

¶ The pretext of the sacrifice at Hebron, in pursuance of a vow made by Absalom in his exile, was meant to touch David's

[1] Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I. ii. 79.

heart in two ways—by appealing to his devotional feelings, and by presenting a pathetic picture of his suffering and devout son vowing in the land where his father's wrath had driven him. Absalom talking about his vow is a spectacle that might have made the most unsuspecting sure that there was something in the wind. Such a use of religious observances shows, more than anything else could do, the utter irreligion of the man who could make it.[1]

¶ Among the very curious grown-up people into whose company I was thrown, although many were frail and some were foolish, none, so far as I can discern, were hypocritical. I am not one of those who believe that hypocrisy is a vice that grows on every bush. Of course, in religious more than in any other matters, there is a perpetual contradiction between our thoughts and our deeds which is inevitable to our social order, and is bound to lead to "cette tromperie mutuelle" of which Pascal speaks. But I have often wondered, while admiring the splendid portrait of Tartufe, whether such a monster ever, or at least often, has walked the stage of life; whether Molière observed or only invented him. To adopt a scheme of religious pretension, with no belief whatever in its being true, merely for sensuous advantage, openly acknowledging to one's inner self the brazen system of deceit—such a course may, and doubtless has been, trodden, yet surely much less frequently than cynics love to suggest.[2]

2. The news of Absalom's revolt came on David like a thunderclap out of a clear sky. It struck him unsuspecting and utterly unprepared. David's rule must have excited discontent not only in Judah but also in the rest of Israel. He appears, for the moment, to have been able to count on but little support west of the Jordan, beyond his six hundred trusted veterans. It seems to have been only the east, which before held so fast by the house of Saul, that now remained true to him likewise. He did not feel himself sufficiently safe from a sudden attack by Absalom, even in his capital, strong as it was, and so he determined to abandon it. He was accompanied by the faithful Cherethites and Pelethites, to whom were added on this occasion a body of Gittites who had probably formed part of David's followers in the old days at Ziklag. The offer of Zadok and Abiathar to accompany him with the ark was declined, and Hushai was also directed to

[1] A. Maclaren. [2] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son*, 233.

remain at Jerusalem and do his utmost to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

This was the darkest hour in David's life. No more pathetic page is found in the Old Testament than that which tells the story of his flight before Absalom. He is crushed by the consciousness that his punishment is deserved—the bitter fruit of the sin that filled all his later life with darkness. His courage and his buoyancy have left him. He has no spirit to make a stand or strike a blow. If Shimei runs along the hillside abreast of him, shrieking curses as he goes, all he says is, "Let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David."

3. Meanwhile Absalom made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and took formal possession of the royal palace and harem. This step destroyed the last chance of a reconciliation between the king and his son. The usurper, however, had not the wisdom to use his advantage effectively. By yielding to the crafty advice of Hushai and delaying an attack, Absalom gave David time to concentrate his loyal followers at Mahanaim, the former capital of Ishbosheth. Ahithophel, who instantly realized that this policy of inaction would be fatal to Absalom's hopes, forthwith destroyed himself. The decisive battle between the loyalists and the rebels was fought shortly afterwards near Mahanaim. Amasa, who had espoused the cause of Absalom, led the rebel army to an attack upon David's forces, which occupied a strong position in the forest of Ephraim. The issue of the battle could not be doubtful. Absalom and Amasa at the head of a large and undisciplined force were no match for David's generals. The great Israelite army was forced to retreat into a wood and was destroyed piecemeal. "The battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." It was in the forest that Absalom met his doom. Riding at full speed on his royal mule he suddenly met a detachment of David's army, and darting aside through the wood, was caught by the head—possibly entangled by his long hair—between the thick boughs of an overhanging tree, known by the name of "The Great Terebinth." He was swept into the branches, and there remained suspended. None of the ordinary soldiers ventured to attack the helpless prince. Joab alone took upon

himself the responsibility of breaking David's orders. He and his ten attendants formed a circle round the gigantic tree, enclosing its precious victim, and first by his three darts, then by their swords, accomplished the bloody work. Hard by was a well-known ditch or pit, of vast dimensions. Into this the corpse was thrown, and covered by a huge mound of stones. Mussulman legends represent hell as yawning at the moment of his death beneath the feet of the unhappy prince. The modern Jews, as they pass the monument in the valley of the Kidron, to which they have given his name, have buried its sides deep in the stones which they throw against it in execration.

¶ The great heap of stones over the pit into which Absalom was thrown was not raised in honour of the king's son, but in detestation of the traitor's enormous crime: and you will find miniature heaps of the same kind and significance all over the country. It is a widespread custom for each one as he passes the spot where any notorious murderer has been buried, to cast a stone upon it. I have often seen this done, and, yielding to the popular indignation, have thrown my stone with the rest. I am reminded of all this by the conduct of my guide, who has actually dismounted to spit upon this heap, and add his pebble to the growing pile. He says the wretch who lies buried there was a notorious robber who infested this road, and committed many cruel murders; and he is using the incident to enforce his admonitions upon us to keep together in this part of our ride, which we will of course conform to as long as it suits our purpose.[1]

4. The mode of Absalom's death, as well as the mode of his burial, was very significant. It had probably never happened to any warrior, or to any prince, to die from a similar cause. And but for the vanity that made him think so much of his bodily appearance, and especially of his hair, death would never have come to him in such a form. His bitterest enemy could have desired nothing more ludicrously tragical than to see those beautiful locks fastening him as with a chain of gold to the arm of the scaffold, and leaving him dangling there like the most abject malefactor. And what of the beautiful face and handsome figure that often, doubtless, led his admirers to pronounce him every inch a king? So slashed and mutilated under the swords of Joab's

[1] W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book* (Revised ed., 1910), 489.

ten men that no one could have told that it was Absalom that lay there. This was God's judgment on the young man's vanity.

¶ The great pit among the sombre trees, where his bloody corpse was hastily flung, with three darts through his heart, and the rude cairn piled over it, were a very different grave from the ostentatious tomb "in the king's dale," which he had built to keep his memory green. This was what all his restless intrigues and unbridled passions and dazzling hopes had come to. He wanted to be remembered, and he got his wish; but what a remembrance! That gloomy pit preaches anew the vanity of "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself," and tells us once more that

> Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.[1]

5. Tidings of his son's end were carried to David at Mahanaim by Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, and a certain Ethiopian; and his distress was so great that the conquering troops, instead of returning in triumph, slunk into the city like beaten men. It was not until Joab addressed the king in tones of threatening remonstrance that he roused himself from his grief and bore himself gratefully towards those whose loyalty had stood between him and the sword of his unworthy son.

¶ Even before he could himself read its stories, or understand thoroughly any of its pictured scenes, some of the sayings of the Bible had fallen upon an ear which felt, even in infancy, the charm which dwells in the cadence of choice and tender words. He was but three years old, when one evening, after it had grown dark, missed and sought for, he was found alone in the nursery, pacing up and down, excited and absorbed, repeating to himself as he walked to and fro the words of David—"O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"[2]

> "Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son!
> Would I had died for thee!" Thus up the stair
> Above the gate he groaned in his despair
> At tidings of that fatal victory won;
> All the dark deeds which Absalom had done
> Merged in sweet memories of his countenance fair;
> The father's heart entangled in that hair,
> Whose golden sheen outvied the orient sun.

[1] A. Maclaren. [2] W. Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr. Chalmers*, i. 8.

Rebel, undutiful, ingrate, unkind,
All was forgotten in that one word—Child;
The father's eyes with tears of love were blind.
So we, God's rebel children, sin-defiled,
Round our Great Father's pitiful heart entwined,
By yearning, dying Love are reconciled.[1]

IV.

The Character of Absalom.

Absalom was the son of David, and David was by no means immaculate on the fleshly side; the natural man was strong in him, though, as a rule, the spiritual man prevailed. He was also the son of Maacah, a Syrian princess, who, if she were like other Syrian princesses, held certain forms of vice and bloodshed to be acceptable rites of worship, well-pleasing in the sight of Heaven. He therefore derived taints of blood, proclivities to evil, from both his parents. And there was little, apparently, in his early training to disinfect his blood, or even to restrain and teach him to restrain its wild unruly impulses. Absalom was indeed a primitive creature, with his life in a world which the better men in Israel were leaving behind—the world of fierce, elemental passions and revenges.

1. Absalom's was a life rooted and grounded in self. The all-engrossing *egotism* of the man comes out at every step. He has no love for man, woman, or child; no thought or feeling of pity for any one in the world except himself. His fellow-men are simply the tools which he uses in building up his own fortunes. He smiles on them, and flatters them, or shoves them out of the way, and tramples on them, according as they are useful to him or otherwise. His one thought is to exalt or gratify himself at their expense or by their aid. Every idea of duty is absent. No throb of generous sentiment ever seems to move him. He has no affection for his kindred, no respect for his father. Filial love has been burned up on the altar of his ambition! He does not care how much suffering he causes if he can gain his ends. He does not care what wrong he does if he can come out

[1] Richard Wilton.

top. An enormous egotism devours everything else. He set up a pillar and called it after his own name. That pillar represented his life. It was a building with his own name written upon it, and no other. There was no thought in it of responsibility, of using his gifts for generous and noble ends, of serving the world or of serving God. It was all to make the world serve him, to get for himself a great position and glory, and to win a sounding name. Ambition goaded him from crime to crime till the land was wrapped in the horrors of civil war—of all wars the most prolific in misery—and nerved him to assail a father's life that he might, over his dead body, step up into the throne.

¶ The Hazaels of our world who are pushed on quickly against their preconceived confidence in themselves to do doglike actions by the sudden suggestions of a wicked ambition, are much fewer than those who are led on through the years by the gradual demands of a selfishness which has spread its fibres far and wide through the intricate vanities and sordid cares of an everyday existence.[1]

¶ In some people, self is not so much a vice of the heart as of the mind. They are not selfish, but self-absorbed. They would not do a dishonest or dishonourable thing to gain an individual profit, perhaps the reverse; but they are so constituted that they cannot take interest in anything beyond their own immediate circumstances and plans, and how they may levy contributions for these. It is a sad defect when the centripetal force of the mind overbalances the centrifugal and makes it, like a whirlpool, draw all to the point of self. It is Divine wisdom that urges the habit of "looking not on our own things, but also on the things of others." Herein Christianity and true courtesy are one.[2]

2. At the bottom of Absalom's egotism was his *irreligion*—what the Scriptures call "ungodliness." He was one of those who say continually in their heart, "There is no God." All the other men who moved about the person and house of David, even the rudest and fiercest of them, had some genuine religious faith working under their rough exterior, and giving some restraint and principle to their conduct. They felt that they were working under the eye of God, and must order their ways accordingly. The polished Absalom had none of this feeling. He had no thought of a present judge or of a future judgment. He was his own master,

[1] George Eliot, *Felix Holt*.

[2] John Ker, *Thoughts for Heart and Life*, 9.

because he did not recognize the hand of the greater Master. His own will was his only law. He had no humility, because he had no reverence; no principle, because he had no faith; no affection for man, because he had no love of God; no tenderness and pity, because, when there is no belief in a heavenly Father, the sentiments of human brotherhood are not awakened. This man went to his ruin because he made himself his own guide.

¶ What he [Napoleon] thought of religion we do not know. He grasped, no doubt, its political force. He would have understood the military value of the loyal piety of the Tyrolese, or the stern fanaticism of the Covenanters. That he deemed religion essential to a nation he proved by his bold achievement of the Concordat. It is clear, too, that he thought the same of morality, of the sanctity of the family, of public and even private virtue. He was never weary of inculcating them. But it never even occurred to him that these rules were applicable to himself, for he soon regarded himself as something apart from ordinary men. He did not scruple to avow his conviction. "I am not a man like other men," he would say; "the laws of morality and decorum could not be intended to apply to me."[1]

If thou could'st empty all thyself of self,
  Like to a shell dishabited,
Then might He find thee on the Ocean shelf,
  And say—"This is not dead,"—
And fill thee with Himself instead.

But thou art all replete with very *thou*,
  And hast such shrewd activity,
That, when He comes, He says—"This is enow
  Unto itself—'Twere better let it be:
It is so small and full, there is no room for Me."[2]

[1] Lord Rosebery, *Napoleon: The Last Phase*, 248.
[2] T. E. Brown, *Old John and other Poems*, 151.

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SOLOMON.

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father only he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places.—1 Kings iii. 3.

Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, and he was beloved of his God.—Neh. xiii. 26.

1. From a merely national and secular point of view, Solomon was unquestionably the greatest king of Israel, the only one who takes his rank with the magnificent potentates of the ancient East. The impression he made on his contemporaries is seen clearly enough in the Biblical records, scanty though they are; and yet there is no vivid personal portrait of the man, like that which we possess of his father. Solomon appears as a splendid and stately figure, almost impersonal in his grandeur, and wrapped in the golden haze of romance. That stately and melancholy figure is, in detail, little more than a mighty shadow.

2. That our existing historical books describe Solomon's life at far less length than that of David is certainly owing to the fact that the memory of his age, taken as a whole, did not afford to posterity a picture of such pure delight as his father's. His reign was a period of stationary or declining military glory, and it was marred, indeed, by more than one stain of national humiliation. The bards of his time, if they shared the genius of those who so gloriously depicted the exploits of David, certainly lacked the inspiration of heroic subjects; nor could posterity dwell with much delight upon the scenes of lavish magnificence which issued in the disruption and decline of the kingdom. Solomon's own exploits, moreover, whether in war or in literature, were surely inferior to his father's, and the mason's trowel is a poor substitute in song and story for sword and harp. Such facts as these might well offset the slight advantage to the critical historian of standing some forty years nearer his subject. But,

still further to complicate the problem, the mass of literature and legend which scribal theory has fathered upon Solomon is of the latest period, with very slight connexion, if any, even with the proclivities and tendencies of that monarch. Even the historical portrait is not only disappointingly incomplete, but displays in full degree that inconsistency we might expect in a report derived from both sides to the great controversy, the final outbreak of which was delayed till after Solomon's death only because repressed by force of arms during his lifetime, and which destroyed for ever the national unity created by David.

There is perhaps no other person of Israelitish history of whose true character and its historical significance it is so difficult to get a clear conception and give a correct picture; for what we know of him is not only scant but also self-contradictory. It is possible to represent him as an Oriental despot of the most common stamp, and support with Bible references every trait of the picture thus drawn, taking credit into the bargain for one's objectivity and freedom from prejudice. But such a judgment would be absolutely unhistorical: Solomon cannot have been an ordinary and insignificant man; on this point history speaks loud and clear. He is, in a still more exact sense than his father, one of the great men of the earth; and, as such, we can deal with his history.

3. Solomon's reign has sometimes been called the Augustan age of the Jewish nation. But there was this peculiarity, that Solomon was not only its Augustus but also, according to tradition, its Aristotle. With the accession of Solomon a new world of thought was opened to the Israelites. We find the first beginnings of that wider view which ended at last in the expansion of Judaism into Christianity. His reign contains the first historical record of the contact between Western Europe and Eastern India. In his fearless encouragement of ecclesiastical architecture is the first sanction of the employment of art in the service of a true religion. In the writings attributed to him, and in the literature which rose out of them, is the only Hebrew counterpart to the philosophy of Greece.

On the whole, however, his policy, although not uninfluenced by worthy and pious aspirations, must be pronounced essentially

selfish. The chief motives of it were the love of pleasure and power, of wealth and splendour and fame; its main object was to promote his own interests, to enrich and glorify himself, and to strengthen and magnify the Davidic dynasty. To obtain his ends, he required to have recourse not only to measures obnoxious to chiefs of tribes, elders of cities, and holders of landed property, but also to such as were most oppressive to the poorer classes. Solomon was responsible for the disruption of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah, and for the consequences of it. That disruption, which led to the loss of the independence of both, was the natural result of the policy on which he acted throughout a forty years' reign.

¶ Solomon belongs to the peculiar class of those who begin well, and then have the brightness of their lives obscured at last. His morning sun rose beautifully; it sank in the evening, clouded and dark with earthly exhalations—too dark to prophesy with certainty how it should rise on the morrow.[1]

I.

The Wise King.

Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil.—1 Kings iii. 9.

1. Nothing is known of Solomon's youth, unless it be that he was brought up by Nathan and that, after the death of the two eldest and best beloved of David's earlier sons, Amnon and Absalom, he must have been regarded as the heir. He was Bathsheba's favourite son, tender and only beloved in the sight of his mother; and Bathsheba, we cannot doubt, was David's favourite wife, and to her David had pledged her son's accession by a solemn and separate oath. But another son, in point of age, came next after Absalom—Adonijah, the son of Haggith. Indeed, Adonijah regarded himself as his father's successor, and even allowed himself to go so far as to assert the rights of that position openly, as Absalom had done. As Absalom had won over Ahithophel, so he won over the two chief among the old advisers

[1] F. W. Robertson.

of the king, each of whom probably had his own cause of quarrel. The other princes, his brothers, also joined him.

But on the other side was Bathsheba supported by Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, the captain of the guard. Nathan, with Bathsheba, succeeded in rousing the languid energies of the aged king, who threw the whole weight of his great name into the scale of Solomon, and advised the course to be pursued. The boy prince was by his order conducted on the king's own mule to Gihon, a sacred spring near Jerusalem, anointed by Zadok and Nathan, proclaimed king, and formally installed on the throne. The joyful acclamations of the people and the blast of the trumpets reached the ears of the conspirators at Adonijah's feast at En-rogel, not far off. There was barely time to ask what the cause was when word was brought by Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, of what had happened—Solomon was king. The only chance for Adonijah was to take refuge at the altar, holding to the horns of which he implored his more fortunate brother for his bare life. He professed allegiance to his brother, and was allowed to live.

2. The opening acts of Solomon's reign were certainly ominous. Apparently he did not consider his throne secure till he had removed out of the way the enemies of his house, and those who had opposed his elevation to the throne. Solomon had already promised his brother Adonijah his life on condition of his future loyalty; but a king's suspicions are easily aroused. Adonijah presumed to seek the hand of Abishag the Shunammite—the young wife who had been given to David in his old age. But, as the entire harem of David was regarded as the peculiar property of his successor on the throne, the aspirant proceeded warily, and sought the good offices of the queen-mother, Bathsheba. Having no suspicion of Adonijah's good faith, Bathsheba put his suit before her royal son. But instead of acceding to the request, Solomon's indignation broke loose; he imagined that treachery was in the air, and, though he had promised to grant Bathsheba whatever she might request, he immediately declared that Adonijah was aspiring to the throne. Without endeavouring to verify his suspicions, he sent and had his brother put to death by Benaiah, the captain of his bodyguard. He then proceeded to

take similar vengeance on Adonijah's partisans, Joab and Abiathar, both of whom had taken part in the assembly at En-rogel. A similar fate befell Shimei, whose death was justified in the same way. Hereupon, the historian concludes, "the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

A different complexion would be given to these dark deeds could we assume that the narrative of David's last charge to his son in the second chapter of 1 Kings is authentic. But the historical probability is in favour of David's entire innocence. Solomon acted on his own initiative with reference to Joab and Abiathar, no less than in the case of Adonijah. We can scarcely resist the impression that Solomon was acting according to the usual custom of Oriental despots. But a careful consideration of the circumstances will reveal the fact that all the men whom Solomon executed richly deserved their fate for their crimes, apart from their dangerous and seditious characters. Thus did Solomon, though only a youth, show a strong hand at the very outset of his government, and give proof of his ability to reign over the people. By these means also he at the very outset secured internal peace for his country.

3. After his coronation, Solomon repaired to "the great high place" of Gibeon, where the Tabernacle of the Congregation was located, and, taking his stand before the brazen altar, which Bezalel had constructed more than 450 years before his reign began, he offered a thousand animals as a sacrifice to God. The succeeding night was spent in Gibeon, and it was there that the Lord revealed Himself to the young king in one of those prophetic dreams which had already been the means of Divine communication in the time of Samuel. Thrice in Solomon's life—at the three epochs of his rise, of his climax, of his fall—is such a warning recorded. This was the first. It was the choice offered to the youthful king on the threshold of life—the choice, so often imagined in fiction, and actually presented in real life—"Ask what I shall give thee."

Solomon's answer has been regarded as ideal and perfect. Not dazzled by the glory of his position, he saw clearly the magnitude of his task, and was humbled and self-distrustful. Gratefully reminding God of His goodness to David his father during his

reign, and this further honour after his death, that a son of his was set upon the throne, he declared that the Divine credit was involved in the success of the dynasty. "And I," he pleads, "am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?" The request of wisdom "to judge this thy so great a people" so pleased Jehovah that He added to the gift of wisdom the riches and honour which Solomon had not asked.

This incident, standing on the threshold of his career, is perhaps the greatest in his life, not excepting the opening of the gorgeous Temple. High thoughts surged through the mind of the young king, humbling and inspiring him. The heavenly light afterwards faded into the light of common day. The glory of his great resolve died out of his soul; but never was he a truer man than then,—

> When on the glimmering limit far withdrawn,
> God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.

4. From the height of Gibeon, the king returned to complete the festival of his accession before the other monument of the Mosaic religion—the ark at Jerusalem. It was in the midst of these sacrificial solemnities that his gift of judicial insight was first publicly attested in the incident known as the judgment of Solomon—his judgment on the rival mothers claiming the child. Here we see a marvellously acute judicial instinct, a knowledge of human nature, and skill to use it, serving not only to gain the admiring dread of his own people but also to establish his place and fame among the nations of the earth and their rulers. The progress of his reign seemed one stately march of peaceful triumph. His policy was dictated by the most obvious principles of practical sense. It was, in a word, to nationalize Israel, substituting for the half-outgrown tribal organization and nomadic institutions the fixed and stable relations of agricultural and commercial peoples. It was a policy of organizing, building, fortifying, of establishing firm control within and advantageous alliance for

commerce and defence without. Israel owed to Solomon's consistent adherence to this well-chosen policy some forty years of peaceful development during the critical period of transition from tribal to national existence. Solomon had influence more or less complete from the borders of Egypt to the banks of the Euphrates. Races and kingdoms on his borders submitted themselves to him, paid him tribute, or propitiated him by presents. He seems to have had command of the caravan routes by which the valuable trade of India reached the west. The great maritime commercial cities of Tyre and Sidon found it to their interest to be on good terms with him. He was able to build Tadmor on an oasis in the desert between Palestine and the Euphrates. The Pharaoh of Egypt was to give him his daughter in marriage. All this proves the prosperous condition of the Israelites at the period, and we are told (1 Kings iv. 25) that "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon."

¶ Carlyle's mind had been formed in his father's house upon the Old Testament and the Presbyterian creed, and, far as he had wandered and deeply as he had read, the original lesson had remained indelible. To the Scotch people and to the Puritan part of the English, the Jewish history contained a faithful account of the dealings of God with man in all countries and in all ages. As long as men kept God's commandments it was well with them: when they forgot God's commandments and followed after wealth and enjoyment, the wrath of God fell upon them. Commerce, manufactures, intellectual enlightenment, political liberty, outward pretences of religiosity, all that modern nations mean when they speak of wealth and progress and improvement, were but Moloch or Astarte in a new disguise, and now as then it was impossible to serve God and Baal. In some form or other retribution would come, wherever the hearts of men were set on material prosperity.[1]

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1834–1881*, i. 12.

II.

The Temple-Builder.

But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!—1 Kings viii. 27.

1. The actual history of the building of the Temple is rooted in the life of King David. David wished, as a thank-offering for the removal of the pestilence which followed or his numbering of the people, to build this house of God on the site of the threshing-floor of Araunah or Ornan the Jebusite. He wished it to be a house "exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries." But it was speedily revealed to him that, though he might design and prepare, this honour was not reserved for him. God revealed to him, "Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; he shall build an house for my name." Still earnestly and faithfully the preparation went on; if David might not build, at least he might prepare. Stones, metal resources, materials of all sorts were collected. And at last Solomon entered on the achievement of his great purpose, and the Temple was built as a House of God; and God, in the emphatic words of the Bible, came to dwell there.

It was the first work that Solomon undertook. The Divine word concerning himself, spoken to his father, sounded in his ears, and gave him no rest till he had set about obeying it. The motives of the great temple-builders of old, as they themselves expound them in hieroglyphics and cuneiform, were largely ostentation and the wish to outdo predecessors; but Solomon was moved by thankfulness and by obedience to his father's will, and still more to God's destination of him.

¶ Writing to his daughter Helen, on her twenty-first birthday, Mr. Gladstone says, "May every blessing attend you; and never forget that our blessings depend under God upon ourselves, and that none of them which come from without can be effectual, unless as the appendages of those which come from within; nor is any life worth living that has not a purpose, or that is not devoted from day to day to its accomplishment. Even in the

humblest sphere, and where it has not pleased God to give powers adequate to more than very humble duties, this is an undoubted truth; and many lives of which the range is small are among the happiest and best, because they are most steadily and most completely given to their appointed purpose."[1]

2. The stones for the Temple were brought partly from Lebanon, partly from the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, partly from the quarries which have recently been discovered under the Temple rock, and which are known by the name of the "Royal Caverns." Hiram, king of Tyre, assisted, and his assistance was doubly valuable, both from the architectural skill of his countrymen, already employed in his own great buildings, and from his supply of the cedar of Lebanon, conveyed on rafts to Joppa. An immense array, chiefly of Canaanites, was raised to work in the forests, and in the quarries of Lebanon. In order to reconcile the spirit of the new architecture as nearly as possible with the letter of the old law, the stones were hewn in the quarries, and placed with reverent silence one upon another. The Temple "rose like an exhalation."

> No hammer fell, no ponderous axes rung,
> Like some tall palm the mystic fabric sprung.

It was a work of seven and a half years; and Solomon gave his best, whether of work or of health, to its completion.

3. When the Temple was finished, it was consecrated with great solemnity to Jehovah's worship. In the midst of a vast procession of priests and representatives of all the tribes of Israel, the ark of the covenant was brought up from the citadel to the holy place prepared for it. Innumerable sacrifices were offered, and Solomon himself spoke the word of dedication:

> "The sun reveals itself in the heavens,
> But Jehovah is pleased to dwell in darkness.
> I have built thee an house of habitation,
> A place for thee to dwell in for ever."

The greatest moment in the life of Israel as a people had arrived—the ark entered, was placed in its splendid shrine, and

[1] D. C. Lathbury, *Letters on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, ii. 193.

the cloud, the Glory of the Lord, the accustomed token of the Sacred Presence in that early revelation, filled the House. The House was God's, and He thus vouchsafed to claim it.

4. It was an enterprise of no less far-seeing policy to build the house of Jehovah in Jerusalem than it was to strengthen its fortifications. The historian himself enters into the description of this work with a fulness and zest which have indeed been plentifully supplemented by the hand of later editors of priestly proclivities, but they indicate plainly enough the knowledge and interest of one whose career must have been intimately associated with this same Solomonic Temple. Here was no ephod, no teraphim, perhaps no asherah, but traditions and a priesthood which went back to the days when Moses led the tribes up out of Egypt, and Joshua gained the first foothold in Canaan with the ark leading the united hosts of Israel. If anything could create a sense of national unity, it would be the religion of Jehovah centring in the shrine where this hallowed relic lay. The historian is right who dates the passing over of the favour of Jehovah and of Israel from Saul to David when Saul destroyed the priest-city of Nob, and Abiathar escaped with the ephod to David, and who dwells with such interest upon the bringing up of the long-neglected ark from Kiriath-jearim to David's new capital. Solomon carries out the wisest element of his father's wise policy in undertaking to build a house for Jehovah on the threshing-floor of Araunah, a sanctuary which shall be not merely a royal chapel, but a central focus for the religious consciousness of all Israel.

¶ One delights to think of the innumerable spots on the earth where truth and faith have combined with beauty and art; where the higher qualities of the spirit have joyously expressed themselves in the works of genius and religion. The Middle Ages, and chiefly the marvellous eleventh century, have left us imperishable monuments here, which sanctify the place they stand on. Who shall call that an inferior, an uninspired age which gives to Italy St. Mark's at Venice, Pisa's glorious pile, the cathedrals of Milan, Modena, Parma; which in North Europe broke out into a foam of lovely structures—Mayence, Treves, Worms, Basel, Brussels; which in France blossomed into the Abbey Church of Cluny, with Chartres, Rouen, and the pile of Notre Dame; that in England

saw Westminster and Canterbury grow to their majestic proportions, and Wells, that dream of beauty! To-day we do not build like that. We are smart and up-to-date. Our structures exhibit our wealth of means, our poverty of ideas. We can make brave show of our marbles and our gildings; but our stones are dead stones; there is no breath in them. It will be when faith is again found upon earth that we shall once more make buildings that are prayers and triumph songs; that stone, kindled once more by inspired breath, shall express again man's sense of immortal life.[1]

5. Of similar magnificence, and doubtless of similar style, were the two palaces, the judgment-hall and the hall of assembly, with which Solomon embellished his capital; and in all he was served in good stead by his commercial treaties. That with Phœnicia not only provided him with timber from Lebanon, and brass and stone cast and cut by Phœnician hands, but also gave him a share in Hiram's Mediterranean commerce with Tarshish in Spain, and ships and sailors for a venture of his own down the Red Sea from Elath. This expedition in turn brought about closer relations with Sheba in southern Arabia. The visit was returned by the queen of that region in person, doubtless for commercial reasons, with abundant interchange of "gifts"; but, in the view of the historian, whose eye seems to rest upon the fragment of an ancient folk-song, descriptive of the queen's praises of Solomon, incorporated in his story, it was "to prove him with hard questions." He answered the torturing questions and won the confidence of this woman who was groping in the dark, till he led her by the hand to the light. Solomon is the embodiment of his people. He does for the queen of Sheba what Israel was meant to do for the world.

¶ The God of the Founder of Christianity has His centre everywhere, His circumference nowhere. All barriers fall before His teaching, like the walls of Jericho at the blast of Joshua's trumpets. He taught mankind the religion of pure inwardness, of true spirituality; and, by elevating love, or sympathy, to the throne in the world of spiritual realities, He revealed a principle of inexhaustible ethical and philosophical value. It is idle to pretend that this Teacher, and this teaching, can be explained within the lines of Jewish pietism. Christ bursts these cramping fetters at every movement. It was a new faith which He brought,

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 193.

a new view of time and eternity. Judaism could no more imprison the soul of this revelation than the tomb at Jerusalem could retain the body of its Founder. The universality of Christianity is based upon, and explained by, the universality of Christ.[1]

III

The Apostate.

The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel.—1 Kings xi. 9.

1. It is a strange and startling step from Solomon the wise temple-builder to Solomon the sensual sybarite, filling Jerusalem with idol-shrines, and setting up those cults, at once licentious and cruel, against which God had launched the whole strength of the Israelitish nation, with a mission to overthrow and utterly extirpate them out of the land. Solomon, the builder of a Temple, which David might not build, to the one true God, raised round about the sacred city shrines to the foul idols of the neighbouring peoples—shrines to Astarte, to Moloch, to Chemosh. Solomon, who had organized the priests and Levites, the services and sacrifices of the sacred ritual, was now encouraging, if not assisting at, rites which were cruel and impure as well as idolatrous.

2. To understand how far Solomon was guilty of religious apostasy, it would be indispensable to ascertain the precise character of the religion of the Israelites before his accession. This is an almost impossible task, and any statement on this subject must be made with hesitation. Israel under Solomon underwent its third great change. At first a collection of wandering tribes, driving their cattle from pasture to pasture, the Israelites were addicted to a very simple worship of Jehovah, the national God. On settling in Canaan, Israel became an agricultural nation, and adopted many of the religious beliefs and customs of the natives of Palestine. David, the shepherd king, was devoted to Jehovah, the God of his ancestors, and showed no disposition to worship the gods of the tillers of the soil, even when he became king.

[1] W. R. Inge, in *The Parting of the Roads*, 11.

Solomon, however, represented neither the ancient Israelitish nomad nor the more modern settler in Canaan. He was reared in an Oriental court and was devoted to foreign luxury and refinement. He honoured Jehovah by building a superb Temple modelled on the shrines of other nations. Tyrians, not Israelites, designed and erected it. Under him the Israelites had a glimpse of civilization greater than they had ever enjoyed, and it was but natural that they should try to emulate other nations. To do so was almost of necessity to tolerate, even to imitate, their religious customs. The zeal Solomon showed for foreign usages extended to their religions, and he doubtless cherished the ambition of breaking down the barriers by which Israel was separated from the rest of the world. For this reason, he built the sanctuaries to foreign gods in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. But the chief glory of Israel has ever been that no worldly advantages have been sufficient to tempt the nation to assimilate with the rest of the world; and the first result of Solomon's policy was probably the disruption of his kingdom, and the second the great strife between the prophets and the House of Omri in Northern Israel, when it endeavoured to follow in his steps.

¶ It must have been toward the close of Solomon's imposing career that the eternal law of action and reaction began to assert itself. Not that Solomon's policy had changed. Not that he was any more uxorious in his old age than before. But simply because a kingdom practically without resources, roads, buildings, commerce, cities, or established institutions, and a people poor and uncultured, though hardy and brave, cannot in one generation be transformed into one of the established world-powers, possessed of all these adjuncts of a settled civilization, even by all the wisdom of Solomon—at least not without incurring a debt so vast as to overtax its endurance. The maintenance of a seraglio, like the increased luxury of the court in all its appointments, did not differ in kind, but only in degree, from the practice of David, and even of Saul. The erection of shrines to various foreign divinities in the environs of Jerusalem, so far as the story rests on trustworthy tradition, was simply an unavoidable adjunct of the policy of commercial and matrimonial alliance with surrounding powers of importance; obnoxious no doubt to the stricter Mosaists, prophets, Rechabites and the like, as Mary Stuart's Popish chapel was obnoxious to John Knox, but no more affecting the Jehovah-worship of Israel or of Solomon than Mary's masses affected the

Protestantism of Scotland. We have no need to call to our aid any hypothetical change in the policy or character of Solomon in his old age. The working of Divine laws in the history of human progress out of a rude and severe, but in many ways purer and nobler, barbarism, into the culture, luxury, refinement, liberalism of a broader but almost invariably laxer and more sensual civilization, is far more vividly illustrated without any such improbable suppositions. The reign of Solomon was a period of rapid, yet uniform transition.[1]

3. Whether Solomon's encouragement of alien cults was prompted by cosmopolitan tastes and motives of policy, or whether it was the result of a real religious indifference, it marked in any case a disastrous turning-point in Israel's religious history. It familiarized the people with the spectacle of idolatrous rites; it introduced a condition of things which, until the age of Josiah, it was found impossible or impolitic to abolish. In fact the evil consequences of Solomon's weakness far outweighed the effects of the zeal which he displayed as founder of the Temple. Nor was his own life what religious existence ought to be—a thing of steady development. If it was excellence, it was excellence marred by inconsistency. It was original uprightness disgraced by a fall, and that fall so prolonged and signal that it has always been a disputed question among commentators whether he ever rose from it again at all. We have nothing to do with pronouncing on Solomon's final condition. Where the giants of the ancient Church of Christ, St. Augustine and St. Chrysostom, differed, we may be content with admitting our ignorance. Nothing is gained by straining the eyes at nightfall over the edge of a precipice; we cannot search out the secrets of the Divine judgment or of the predestination of souls. Certain it is that Solomon's sin brought its punishment in this world: "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee." The oppressive system of forced labour and burdensome taxation by which the king gratified his taste for luxury and for splendid architecture; his heartless disregard for the welfare and even the liberty of his subjects; his despotic treatment of the Northern tribes, coupled with his manifest partiality for his own kinsmen of Judah—all these things sowed broadcast the seeds of discontent and prepared the way for a disruption of

[1] B. W. Bacon.

the kingdom. The ravages of Hadad, the son of the last Edomitish king, and of Rezon, king of Syria, and, above all, the revolt of Jeroboam, which, after Solomon's death, resulted in the disruption of his kingdom, must, according to the historian, be regarded as so many signs of Jehovah's anger at Solomon's apostasy.

¶ He who is of noble descent through his father or his forefathers, and degenerates therefrom, is not only vile, but most vile, and more worthy of reproach and contempt than any base churl. And to the end that a man may keep himself from this lowest depth of vileness, Solomon, in the twenty-second chapter of his Proverbs, says unto him whose forefathers have been righteous: "Thou shalt not transgress the ancient boundaries, which thy fathers did set up." To his further shame I say that this most vile person is as dead, though he seem alive; and know ye that verily the wicked man may be said to be as dead, and above all such an one as walks not in the ways of his righteous forefathers.[1]

4. We cannot attribute to Solomon personally much share in the literary product of his age, though Hebrew literature, as such, unquestionably dates its beginnings from this period. It is beyond dispute that, under the influence of the genius of Solomon, there grew up in his court a school of wisdom. Whilst the Levitical institutions performed their functions regularly, and the Mosaic ordinances were more and more impressing their stamp upon the life of the people, the leading minds, with the king himself at their head, were feeling the necessity of searching more deeply into the knowledge of things Divine and human. Beneath the Israelite they tried then to find the man; beneath the Mosaic system, that universal principle of the moral law of which it is the perfect expression. Thus they reached to that idea of Wisdom which is the common feature of the three books, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. The Divine Wisdom, in the idea of which are included the notions of intelligence, justice, and goodness, is personified as the supreme object of Divine love, and as the spirit which gives existence and order to the world; this Wisdom has marked with her stamp everything that exists in the universe; her delight is not in the Jews only, but in the children of men. To conform to her laws is, for man, wisdom; to act against them is folly.

[1] Dante, *Convivio*, iv. 7 (trans. by Paget Toynbee).

¶ The Wisdom which the Wise inculcate is not the slow, prudent thrift of life, gathered by petty experiences, more or less sordid and selfish; but is the reverent and whole-hearted acceptance of great principles, such as capture the heart, stir us to enthusiasm, and lift us above ourselves. In contrast to the prophets who won their truth by vision, the wise men got theirs by experience. Yet do not understand by this that they would counsel their disciples to wait for their own experience—to gather wisdom merely by trying life as it came to them. They would have them begin with Wisdom from the first, get hold of her principles, submit to her discipline, and then test her in all their daily fortunes and duties. Righteousness is not abstract nor unreal; not hard to find in the crowd about us, nor in her beginnings beyond the reach of any, however thronged or trampled by the world. Everywhere her gates are open, her presence manifest, her joys obvious and solid. She dwells with men. There is not an arena on which we are called to live but is brilliant with the incarnate examples of righteousness and purity. She dwells with God, and was with Him when the world was made. The forces of the Universe are on the side of the will that chooses virtue: and to the ignorant and the wanderer, if they have but one spark of desire for what is pure and honest and lovely, the heart of God Himself comes forth with the desire to teach, to lift, to restore. This is the Spirit of Christ in Hebrew Wisdom.[1]

[1] G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, 313.

JEROBOAM.

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JEROBOAM.

The man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour.—1 Kings xi. 28.

1. THERE were three occasions in the history of Israel when the people took a great share in changing their rulers; not acting in any case altogether alone, but in each case exercising a powerful, and in the end a decisive, voice. One of these was when the form of government was changed to a monarchy and Saul was made king; another was when the house of Saul was finally removed from power and that of David succeeded; the third was when the people split into two parts, and the tribe of Judah remained under the dominion of Rehoboam, while the ten tribes set up Jeroboam, and formed a people by themselves. Jeroboam was put forward, in some respects, just as Saul had been, just as David had been. He had been told by a prophet that he was to be the future king of ten tribes, and therefore might plead a Divine warrant for all that he did. But as we read the history, the difference between him and either Saul or David is visible at a glance. Saul kept in the background when he was chosen, and even after the election went quickly home to wait till the need of him should be felt. David made no effort to possess himself of the throne till he was regularly invited. But from the first mention of him, Jeroboam appears as a mere demagogue. He stands forward at once as the leader; and when he has gained his end, and sits on the throne, he thinks above everything else of his own security. No religious consideration stands in his way. In fact, Jeroboam is represented throughout Scripture as simply the man who made Israel to sin. David and Jeroboam stand side by side at the head of the Chronicles of the two kingdoms. Both are looked back to at every turn. The kingdom of Judah which David founded was at its worst a chequered course of good and bad, happiness and grief; the kingdom of Israel was almost uninterruptedly bad and

miserable. Israel is soon carried away captive, never to return. Judah is long spared, and, after all, its captivity is not a perpetual, though a long one. At every stage of either series we are referred now to David and now to Jeroboam. David is the good example, after whom not a few kings "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that their father David had done"; and they prospered, and their people had peace and prosperity. Jeroboam is the great warning. Like the tolling of the bell in the village, which strikes the years of the dead as they are borne to their burial, so tolls this refrain of the scribe, from chapter to chapter, until twenty-three times it is repeated of king after king in the Chronicles of the Northern Kingdom: "He walked in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin," and then he is "buried in the sepulchre of his fathers," and the son reigns in his stead. Frequently, indeed, this is the only history we have—the sad brief summary of the whole reign; as though the historian were weary of the same story repeated over and over again, and thought it needless to say more than that the story *was* repeated.

2. The history of the ten tribes is a record of continually deepening degeneracy. From this time, too, all the brilliancy passes away from the house of David. His grand anticipations of what should come to pass in after-times, if they had a partial accomplishment in the days of his son, seemed to be belied by the history of the son's sons. Prophets mourn over a land devoured by strangers, a land which might be described in the language of Isaiah: "Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts and followeth after rewards; they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them." The noblest specimens of the royal race were men the main business of whose reigns was to remove the corruptions of their predecessors. The last and most zealous of all was unable, by his reforms, to avert the downfall and captivity of his people. All these evils were evidently connected in the minds of the prophets with the schism of the tribes. They look upon their division as containing the principle, and illustrating the effects of all divisions which should happen in all nations in times to come. Their belief that unity would some day be restored to their land

is identified with the hope of peace and righteousness for the whole earth.

I.

The Divided Kingdom.

1. Jeroboam appears to have been a man of lowly origin. Of his father Nebat, whose name is so often linked with his own, we know nothing, although an old Jewish tradition, preserved by Jerome, identifies him with Shimei, who was the first to insult David in his flight, and the first of all the house of Joseph to congratulate him on his return. All we know with certainty is that he belonged to the powerful tribe of Ephraim, which was always jealous of the supremacy of Judah, and therefore hated David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. It was this feeling of which Jeroboam skilfully availed himself when he split the kingdom of David in twain. In the Book of Kings, this remarkable man first appears as an ordinary workman, or possibly as a foreman of the masons who were engaged in building Fort Millo, one of the chief defences of the citadel of Zion, guarding its weakest point, and making it almost impregnable. Solomon, the king, "seeing the young man that he was industrious," assigned to him the oversight of the forced labour of the house of Joseph—the very best opportunity for becoming acquainted with the complaints of the people and turning them to advantage.

2. In 1 Kings x. 1, we are distinctly told that a prophet stirred up in the mind of Jeroboam those thoughts which led him to rise against Solomon. Either Ahijah or Shemaiah met Jeroboam in the way outside Jerusalem, and, leading him to a solitary spot, by the symbolic act of tearing in twelve pieces Jeroboam's new garment, and giving him ten pieces back, showed that he could read the young man's secret ambitions, and predicted that after Solomon's death the kingdom would be divided as a punishment for the king's apostasy, that Jeroboam would reign over ten of the tribes, and that his kingdom would have the promise of continuance, if he himself were loyal to Jehovah. The promise to David, however, could not be entirely broken; his grandson would still have one tribe (counting Judah and Benjamin together)—"that

David my servant may have a lamp alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there." Jeroboam apparently could not keep silence about this audacious prophecy, and the news of it came to the ears of Solomon. The aspirant had to flee for his life, and took refuge in Egypt, where he met with a good reception from the Pharaoh Shishak, the Sheshonk who founded the twenty-second dynasty of Manetho. Like his illustrious ancestor Joseph, Jeroboam soon became a favourite, acquired much influence, and ultimately married Ano, the eldest sister of the Egyptian queen.

¶ In the Septuagint there are two accounts of the way in which Jeroboam became king. The first agrees substantially with the Hebrew, when the contradictions of the text of 1 Kings xii. (cf. vv. 2, 3, with 20) are removed. As soon as Jeroboam heard of the death of Solomon, he returned from Egypt; he did not attend the conference between Rehoboam and the people at Shechem, but he kept within reach, and came when he was sent for. The other account is inserted at xii. 24. It covers the same ground as the first, but with considerable additions and variations. On hearing of Solomon's death, Jeroboam returned from Egypt, where he had found a patron in Shishak and an Egyptian princess for a wife (xii. 24*c*), mustered his tribe at Shechem, and so gave the immediate occasion for the revolt. The most important divergence, however, between the two Greek accounts is found in the prophecies which promise Jeroboam the leadership of the ten tribes. In the first we have the prophecy of Ahijah delivered to Jeroboam at Jerusalem at the time of Solomon; in the second a similar prophecy is put into the mouth of Shemaiah at Shechem in the time of Rehoboam. Both accounts are clearly translated from Hebrew originals, which must have existed when the Septuagint translation was made. The Hebrew text was not fixed, and the tradition was fluctuating; we cannot feel certain as to what was the actual course of events. With regard to Ahijah a similar uncertainty exists. The prophecy in 1 Kings xi. 29–39 appears to be an interpolation, for it interrupts the account of Jeroboam's rebellion, which is expected after ver. 28 and implied by ver. 40. It could not have been Ahijah's prophecy which aroused Solomon's suspicions, for it was a private communication, addressed to Jeroboam alone, as is expressly stated; no third party was aware of it. We find, then, two different traditions of Jeroboam's accession to the sovereignty; the correct history of it must remain uncertain.[1]

[1] G. A. Cooke, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 582.

3. The revolt which led to the division of the kingdom and the elevation of Jeroboam was a revolt against the government of Solomon and the heavy burdens which it laid upon the people. The empire of Solomon was too swift in its development, and too ambitious, to last. It is quite likely that Ahijah, in his justifiable antagonism to Solomon's erection of the high places to the gods of his foreign wives, may have urged Jeroboam to rebel against the king. But it is not said or even hinted that Jeroboam felt the horror which Ahijah felt of Solomon's superstition. The king might have worshipped Chemosh and Milcom without exciting any indignation in the son of Nebat. He appears as the spokesman and representative of those who were oppressed by Solomon's exactions for building Millo and repairing the breaches in the city of David. The tyranny grew out of the idolatry. Though Jeroboam might not perceive the root, he could perceive the evil fruit, which deserved to be hated for its own sake; he was therefore qualified to execute Ahijah's prophecy, not merely as a dull instrument, but as one who had, to a certain extent, a righteous purpose.

¶ Jeroboam was a born king and statesman; and both Israel and Egypt, both heaven and earth, confessed it to be so. And if only Jeroboam had tarried the Lord's leisure, and had kept his heart clean and humble, Jeroboam would soon have been king over all Israel, he and his sons, till the Messiah came Himself to sit down on David's undivided throne.[1]

4. It is impossible to state accurately what occurred immediately after Solomon's death. His son and successor, Rehoboam, was not able to assume the crown at Jerusalem, but had to assemble the tribes at Shechem, the capital of the haughty tribe of Ephraim, and listen to their grievances. They offered him the kingdom if he would pledge himself to abolish, or at any rate to relax, the claim to demand compulsory service from his subjects, so rigidly enforced by Solomon. In all this the guiding hand of the prophets is clearly recognizable. The wise old counsellors of Solomon advised moderation. They said it was a case for concessions; let the king give way gracefully at this juncture and bide his time, and he would be as powerful as ever Solomon had

[1] Alexander Whyte.

been. But a man who has waited too long for a position of responsibility is sometimes as disqualified to exercise it as the merest youth; and Rehoboam had evidently cherished high ideas of his royal prerogative. His companions advised him to insist upon his rights, and he forsook the counsel of the old men, that had stood before Solomon his father, and at the suggestion of his friends, who knew nothing of the practice of authority, told his petitioners bluntly, "My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." Jeroboam's experiences in the days of Solomon had taught him caution. He returned from Egypt, but did not apparently go to Shechem till he knew how Rehoboam would act. Throughout his career he seems to have shown himself a clever, if unscrupulous, politician. It needed no agitator to increase the effect of Rehoboam's foolish reply to the reasonable demands of his subjects. No sooner was it made than all the tribes save Judah repudiated his authority, and the answer of the delegates at Shechem found an echo throughout the land: "What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David."

Jeroboam became the champion of the new cause. Rehoboam received the deserts of his mad folly in a speedy defeat. He fled to Jerusalem, to reign over a dismembered country. The kingdom of David and of Solomon was henceforth divided into Israel and Judah, and was never united again. Rehoboam reigned in Jerusalem. Jeroboam set up his throne as king of the land variously spoken of in Scripture as "Israel," "Samaria," or "Ephraim."

¶ The besetting sin of strong minds is despotism; his strength naturally gives the strong man the feeling that he has a right to dominate, but no right in this complex world is absolute; every right demands a qualification from some counter right, besides being subject to the general law of moderation. The moment he forgets this the strong man becomes a despot. Despotism in common parlance is a political word, but there is a despotism of beauty, of generosity, of any strong passion or high ideal, as well as of power, which the more readily masters a strong man because its character is unselfish. Government of men or of beasts must

always be with a strong hand first, with a kind hand afterwards, but with a strong hand always in the background.[1]

II.

Jeroboam's Idolatry.

1. Regarding Jeroboam's reign of twenty-two years (937–915) we have little trustworthy information. How far he was able to maintain Solomon's authority we can only conjecture. At first, no doubt, he would have had a considerable struggle to maintain himself against his rival. But no decisive victory or success on Jeroboam's side is recorded; he seems even to have retired from Shechem to Penuel beyond the Jordan (1 Kings xii. 25). When the Pharaoh Shishak made a plundering expedition into Judah, he certainly did not spare the territory of his former *protégé*, as appears from his triumphal inscription at Karnak; but we are not told that Jeroboam made any attempt at resistance. Perhaps he was more a politician than a warrior. There is one measure, however, which is ever after referred back in the most emphatic way to Jeroboam. Realizing the hypnotizing power which the national worship and festivals of Jerusalem would exercise upon the mind and heart in restoring the tribes to the sovereignty of the house of David, he established national sanctuaries at the ancient shrines of Dan on the north and at Bethel on the south, and in each he set up the golden image of a bull, with imposing rites of dedication, in order to wean the hearts of Israel from the altars of Jerusalem. He then proceeded to ordain his own priests from the ranks of the common people—doubtless a measure of necessity, as in the rending of the kingdom the Levites had flocked to the Temple of Judah. Later on he instituted the great yearly festivals with unusual splendour, and so satisfied the social hunger of the tribes. Thus by a single *coup d'état* he broke the continuity of the national worship and introduced, perhaps unwillingly, the idolatry of Egypt. As we read the abbreviated record of these acts of the new king and recognize the political ability with which he initiated the new kingdom, we are impressed by a double consciousness—that of the splendid chance which Jehovah

[1] *The Day-Book of John Stuart Blackie*, 192.

put in the way of this man to retrieve the spiritual and civic fortunes of Israel, and also that of the tremendous difficulty of measuring a man's sin.

This king of Israel, who is first in order of time, is also first in guilt, memorable for nothing but making his people sin. From the first he seems to have been an irreligious man. He regarded religion as a kind of restraint on the lower orders, and therefore useful in government. In Egypt he had become accustomed to the ritual of Apis and Mnevis, which was by no means so gross and demoralizing as the idolatry of the Canaanites, and he evidently could not see why the worship of Jehovah could not be carried on by those who believed in Him through the use of emblems, and, if need be, of idols. Therefore he set about the establishment of the cult of Apis, and "made two calves of gold. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan." This was the sin for which he was condemned again and again with almost wearisome iteration.

2. But the charge which is brought against Jeroboam is scarcely intelligible if we forget that his kingdom stood, like that which was in Jerusalem, upon the promise and covenant of God. He had a right to believe that the God of Abraham and of Isaac, of David and of Solomon, would be with him, and would establish for him a sure house. He had a right to live and act upon this conviction. His sin was that he did not act upon it. He did not trust the living God. He thought, not that his kingdom stood upon a Divine foundation, but that it was to be upheld by certain Divine props and sanctions. He wanted a God as the support of his authority; *what* God he cared very little. The question was soon settled. It was on the senses and on the terrors of his subjects that he worked. Something visible and tangible served best for that purpose—visible and tangible, and yet invested with an awe and a mystery which were borrowed from that which was invisible and intangible. This would be enough to explain the calves in Bethel and Dan.

And his crime was all the greater that he, as king of Israel, did not treat the Temple with respect. For political separatist interests he had lightly sacrificed what was a vital interest for Israel as a whole. We may hold what opinion we choose regarding

the Deuteronomic redactor of the Book of Kings in his character as historian, but nothing witnesses so strongly to his deep religious insight as the fact that he cannot sufficiently censure Jeroboam's abandonment of the Temple, and his falling away into the worship of Jehovah under the form of an image. For the sake of political security Jeroboam deliberately sacrificed the higher religious interests of Israel; and there can be no doubt that the sacred writer was fully justified in his unsparing verdict upon him as the man "who made Israel to sin."

¶ Jeroboam's calves remain in the world for ever, until the Last Day; for whatever a man places his confidence and trust in, setting God aside, that is to him like Jeroboam's calves, which he worships and invokes instead of the only true, living, eternal God, who alone can and will give counsel and help in all need.[1]

3. As Jeroboam's sin was great in the sight of Heaven, so was his punishment. Twice was he warned in a signal manner.

(1) As he and his unconsecrated priests were at the altar in Bethel sacrificing and burning incense, a prophet from Judah (unnamed and unknown), Divinely sent, came into their midst and cried against the altar, *i.e.* against the whole system of idolatry set up in Israel, saying, "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." To show his Divine commission, the prophet gave the word, and the altar was miraculously rent in twain, and the ashes of the sacrifice were scattered on the ground. Jeroboam stretched forth his hand to seize the prophet; it was instantly shrivelled up, so that he could not pull it to him again. At the prophet's prayer, it was restored.

¶ This narrative belongs to a much later time, when the names of "the man of God from Judah" and of "the old prophet" were forgotten. Some critics think that it is founded upon 2 Kings xxiii. 15–20; others, that the latter passage, apparently foreign to the context where it stands, was added by the same hand which inserted the story here.[2]

(2) Again the Lord spoke to Jeroboam, and tried to reach him

[1] Luther, *Table Talk*, i. 286.
[2] G. A. Cooke, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 583.

on that side of his nature most of all susceptible to influence—through the death of his child. When Abijah fell sick Jeroboam sent his wife in disguise to inquire of the prophet Ahijah what would become of the child. Heavy, said the blind prophet, recognizing the disguised queen—for he had been Divinely forewarned—heavy were the tidings he had for her. The idolatrous apostasy of her husband Jeroboam would not go unpunished. Evil would come upon his house, and every man of it would be ignominiously cut off by a king yet to come, all but her innocent child, who would soon die and be buried in peace. The people would be swept away into exile for the idolatry into which Jeroboam had led them. Then we are told that "Jeroboam's wife arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah: and when she came to the threshold of the door, the child died; and they buried him; and all Israel mourned for him, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by the hand of his servant Ahijah the prophet."

¶ We are only on the threshold of knowledge as to the significance of the doctrines of heredity, but we know enough to deepen our sense of debt to the past and of duty to the future. We are what our forefathers made us, plus the action of circumstances on ourselves; and in like manner our children inherit the good and evil both of body and mind that is in us. Upon us, therefore, rests the duty of the cultivation of the best, and of the suppression of the worst, so that the future of the race suffers not at our hands. More imperious is that duty since nothing—not omnipotence itself—can step in between us and the consequences of our acts. The "forgiveness" of which men talk shows the charity of the injured, but the thing "forgiven"—who can undo its effects?[1]

4. At the close of his reign, Jeroboam lost even his earthly prosperity. "The Lord struck him, and he died." Such was his end. Jeroboam's personal career was inglorious; he could lay no claim to distinguished success in war. Nor did he derive any advantage from the invasion of the rival kingdom by Shishak, his former protector. From the first the curse of instability rested upon a throne which had been founded in rebellion. He had successfully managed a revolt, but he did not succeed in establishing a dynasty. If the revolt was part of the Divine plan, Jeroboam proved himself unequal to the greatness of his opportunity; and,

[1] Edward Clodd, *The Story of Creation.*

so far from advancing the higher interests of his people, did not rise above the popular standards, and bequeathed to posterity the reputation of an apostate and a succession of endless revolutions.

¶ Turnaway, once a townsman of Apostasy, appears but for a moment, and Christian catches only a glimpse of his hanging head as he is hurried past, in the grasp of "seven devils," and bound with "seven strong cords," to that awful side-door of the abode of woe. He is identified, beyond much likelihood of mistake; for the placard on his back is legible enough even to an eye that has little of learning—"Wanton professor and damnable apostate." The inscription is probably judicial, and the characterization is no doubt as accurate as it is emphatic and without appeal. His is a pronounced case of the violation of all the most sacred laws which govern the Pilgrimage. Dark wickedness combined with religious sham, and implacable hatred to religion engendered when the mask could no longer be worn—this is the double indictment under which the man passes, constabled by fiends, to his doom. Great-heart, at "the place where Christian met with one Turnaway," gives us somewhat more "concerning this man." "Once falling, persuasion could not stop him,"—as the experience of Evangelist proved. It seems he went no farther than the Cross, where he "gnashed with his teeth, and stamped, and said he was resolved to go back to his own town." How he comes to be met with, even as a bound culprit, so far on in the heavenward road, we can only guess; but having escaped from Evangelist "over the wall" near the Wicket-gate, he must have found pilgrimage more attractive along the Devil's territory, and have pushed his unholy way even beyond the advanced stage at which we encounter him. In any case he "went back to" apostasy with a will; and there is no healthy-hearted reader who can quarrel with his fate.[1]

[1] J. A. Kerr Bain, *The People of the Pilgrimage*, ii. 303.

AHAB.

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AHAB.

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to do that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. —1 Kings xxi. 25.

Ahab did yet more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.—1 Kings xvi. 33.

THE kingdom of Israel had gone on from bad to worse. It was a bad beginning when the ten tribes revolted from the rule of the house of David; when they elected "Jeroboam the son of Nebat," that mighty but unscrupulous man of valour, to rule over them as their king. It was a bad beginning when, from motives of state policy, Jeroboam prevented his people from worshipping God at Jerusalem, and set up the calves at Dan and at Bethel. It was a bad beginning when he set up at one and the same time a rival kingdom and a rival Church. But things were far worse in the days of Ahab. Fifty years had passed away, and the consequences of the policy of Jeroboam were beginning to develop themselves. Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri had successively sat upon the newly erected throne of Israel, and of each it might be said he exceeded in wickedness all that had gone before him. Ahab succeeded Omri, and of him it is distinctly said that he "did yet more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." It was he who, at the instigation of Jezebel, introduced the worship of Baal into the land, and made it one vast moral wilderness.

I.

AHAB'S APOSTASY.

1. When we first hear of Ahab, we find him simply a man of his times. The current which Jeroboam set in motion was run-

ning strong and deep, and he drifted in it. Had it been his good fortune to have allied himself with wisdom and strength of character and goodness, he might have been induced to breast the current, and so have been saved. As it was, we read of him this brief record: "It came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him." It is true that this was part of the policy of close alliance with Phœnicia begun by Solomon and cemented by Omri. This bond of union was designated by Amos (i. 9) a "covenant of brethren." It was undoubtedly founded on reciprocal commercial interests which subsisted for centuries, the corn, oil, and other agricultural products of Canaan being exchanged for other commercial products of the great mercantile ports of Phœnicia (cf. Acts xii. 20).

Amongst the considerations which led Ahab to make friends of his neighbours, the increasing perception of the danger which threatened the kingdom from the side of Assyria was probably one of the most important. What befell the Phœnician cities under Asurnaṣirpal could leave no possible doubt as to what was to be expected in course of time from that quarter. This perception of the coming danger reveals Ahab's statesmanlike insight. Besides, Israel was still at feud with Damascus. The ancient alliance with the Phœnicians had been in abeyance since the days of Solomon. The two kingdoms in Israel had been too much occupied with their own inner feuds to be able to turn their attention to foreign countries. Besides, as they had been weakened by civil war, they were not valuable allies for anybody. Now, however, the common danger which threatened from the east, and the recollection of their racial kinship and common interests, forced Israel and her western neighbour once more together. Even before the time of David, Tyre (Sôr) seems to have taken the place of the more ancient Sidon, and to have exercised, as it did at this period, a predominant authority amongst the Phœnician cities.

¶ Tyre is at present a small and wretched place, with the pretence of a bazaar, in which beans, tobacco, dates, and lemons are the chief articles for sale. It is only a collection of miserable houses, of one or two storeys, with filthy lanes for streets, and lies

on what was once the famous island-site of the ancient city. Along the sea-face the rocks are rugged and picturesque, cut out at many points by the ancient population, with great patience and ingenuity, into a series of small harbours, landing-places for boats, shallow docks, and salt-pans. The whole length of the site is only about 1200 yards from north to south and about a third less from east to west, so that the Tyrians must have been wonderfully crowded within the walls, for the island was, doubtless, in great part covered with tall warehouses, landing-wharves, sailors' barracks, and all the other accessories of a huge commerce. It is impossible, now, to trace the docks in which the great Tarshish ships lay safe from the winds, for the sea and man have long since removed nearly all remains of the past. Pillars of granite and syenite taken from ancient temples or public buildings, for binding the wall, now lie, sometimes in numbers, on the sand and the rocks. At low water, remains of ancient concrete pavement are to be seen, full of bits of pottery, smoothing the roughness of the ledge, and enabling boats to land safely. There are still some remains of a mole, and at the very north of the island a stone nearly seventeen feet long, and six and a half feet thick, shows the splendour of the sea-wall of Old Tyre thousands of years ago. The harbours are now entirely sanded up. Ruins of the wall still remain, showing that it once ran round the whole extent, looking down on the sea edge, over the waves, twenty to thirty feet below. Of the ancient industries of Tyre—the glass factories and dye-works, once so noted—the only traces remaining are fragments of glass, which have become consolidated into a hard mass with the sand of the rocky slopes, and thick layers of crushed shells of the murex, which, having yielded the famous purple, were cast out near the town.[1]

2. Jezebel was a woman in whom, with the reckless and licentious habits of an Oriental queen, were united the fiercest and sternest qualities inherent in the old Semitic race. Her husband, in whom generous and gentle feelings were not wanting, was yet of a weak and yielding character which soon made him a tool in her hands. Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon and high priest of Astarte, with all the stern, fierce, fanaticism of her blood, ruled over both Ahab and his kingdom of Israel. The subtle queen had her hundreds of priests at her beck and call. The splendid ritual of Baal—enforced by the example and patronage of her court, made fascinating to the mob

[1] Cunningham Geikie, *The Holy Land and the Bible*, 404.

by every trapping of magnificence, performed by a priesthood whose influence was unbounded, backed by all the despotic power of the fashion of Tyre and Sidon—at last triumphed everywhere. A temple and an altar to Baal, as well as an Asherah-pole, were erected in Samaria.

¶ In the Canaanitish high places Baal was represented not by an image, but by a pillar or obelisk (Massēbah), Ex. xxiii. 24, Lev. xxvi. 1, 2 Kings iii. 2 (Revised Version), wrongly translated as "image" in A.V. And close to it and the altar would be the Asherah, wrongly translated in A.V. as "grove" (cf. A.V. and R.V., 1 Kings xviii. 19). What kind of object the Asherah was appears from Deut. xvi. 21: "Thou shalt not plant an Asherah of any kind of wood (or, an Asherah, any kind of tree) beside the altar of Jehovah"; it must therefore have been either a living tree, or a tree-like post, and in all probability either form was originally admissible. The Asherah was undoubtedly an object of worship (Isa. xvii. 8). The Asherah was a sacred symbol, the seat of the deity. The opinion that there was a Canaanitish goddess called Ashera (the female partner of Baal) does not seem to rest on any sure foundation. Upon the Asherah votive offerings would be hung, and even to this day in Palestine the traveller frequently meets with holy trees hung with rags as tokens of homage. In the process of time the pillar or obelisk (Massēbah) (with which we may perhaps compare the maen-hir or single upright stone occasionally met with in North Wales and in Brittany, perhaps some remnant of Druidical worship) would come to be fashioned and carved in various ways, till ultimately it becomes a statue, or anthropomorphic idol of stone, and the sacred tree or post (Asherah) ultimately developed into an image of wood. And the pillar and the Asherah would be looked upon as holy, because the worshipper believed that the god comes into the stone or wood, dwells in it, and animates it, so that for practical purposes the stone is thenceforth an embodiment of the god, and may be spoken of and dealt with as if it were the god himself. The Massēbah, which was originally an upright stone, uncut and unchiselled, came to be looked upon as a phallic symbol, appropriate only to sensual nature worship, and as such was attacked by the prophets (Isa. xxvii. 9; Mic. v. 13–14; cf., however, Isa. xix. 19).[1]

3. To supersede Israel's national deity, Jehovah, by the Tyrian Baal seemed an easy task. To a superficial observer the difference

[1] E. Sinker, in *Church and Synagogue*, iii. 81.

between the worship of Ephraim and that of Samaria might appear trifling. Both Baal and Jehovah were worshipped with similar sacrificial accompaniments. Moreover, Northern Israel had for centuries been exposed to all the influences which their more highly civilized Canaanite neighbours had introduced (Judg. ii. 12, 13), and even the very name Baal, "Lord," was current in their speech as an appellation of Jehovah (Hos. ii. 16, 17). Yet there was one deep distinction which marked off the Jehovah of Mosaism from the Baal of the Canaanites. The religion of Mosaism was free from sensual taint, whereas the worship of Baal was essentially the worship of mere power, not necessarily or originally an evil power, but the worship of power as distinguished from righteousness. Such a worship would naturally develop licentiousness, and would certainly have its temple attendants, probably Tyrian *Kedeshim* and *Kedeshoth*. Baal did not indeed take the place of Jehovah as the national god, or even attract to himself the entire worship of the court, as appears from (*a*) the names (compounded with JAH or JO) which were borne by some of Ahab's children (Ahaziah, Jehoram, Joash, Athaliah); (*b*) the attendance upon Ahab of Obadiah (who, both by his name and by his own confession was a servant of Jehovah); and (*c*) the assembling in Ahab's presence even at the close of his reign, of prophets who professed to speak in Jehovah's name. But the influence of Jezebel led not only to the protection and toleration of Baal-worship, but also to its active dissemination and the persecution of those prophets of Jehovah who opposed her religious zeal. Some of the Lord's prophets were cut off, others imprisoned, others hidden; His altars were thrown down; His sacrifices ceased; His people were driven into obscurity. The light of the land was darkened; the land was defiled with blood; deeds of abominable wickedness were unblushingly committed. The land was ruled by Ahab: Ahab was ruled by Jezebel: Jezebel was under idolatry to Baal and Ashtoreth: and Baal and Ashtoreth were gods of blood and of uncleanness.

¶ In the "Quarterly Statement" of the Palestine Exploration Fund for October 1909, Mr. Stanley A. Cook, M.A., describes some remarkable traces of the cult of Baal and Astarte which have been found in England. The evidence includes an altar of cream-coloured sand-stone discovered at Corchester, the Roman

settlement near Corbridge between Hexham and Newcastle. The front of the altar bears a Greek inscription which reads, "Thou seest me an altar of Astarte: Pulcher set me up." Another Greek inscription found at Corchester is in the form of a hexameter line, and, translated, reads, "To the Tyrian Heracles, Diodora the Archpriestess." The ornaments on the altars include a oenochoe, or jug, a patera, a garland, the head of an ox, and a sacrificial knife. At Chesters near Corbridge were also found the remains of a draped statue of a female, standing on some animal, highly suggestive of a goddess of the Astarte type. Other traces of Semitic culture brought to light include an altar, which was found near at Carvoran (the Roman Magna), and which was erected by the first cohort of Hamians to the Syrian goddess. The Hamians were famous archers, and their name is supposed to be derived from Hamath in Syria. They are believed to be closely related to the more celebrated Iturean bowmen—the Ituraei frequently mentioned by Latin writers. That they should have cherished their native cult so far from home is no matter of surprise, nor is it unlikely they should have left traces of it in several places. "It is difficult, at first sight," says Mr. Cook, "to determine under what circumstances the worship of Astarte and this Baal of Tyre reached our country. It is well known that under Roman influence the cult of Mithra spread throughout the Roman Empire as far west as England; and, when we recollect the popularity of Eastern cults in Rome, it does not seem improbable that the same indirect influence accounts for the evidence from Corchester. The alternative suggestion is that among the Roman soldiers at Corchester were foreign mercenaries of veritable Semitic origin."

4. The stern ascetic Elijah suddenly emerged from the solitudes of Gilead as the "personified conscience" of the nation. After publicly predicting that Jehovah would chastise the apostasy of Israel by a prolonged drought, he vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. An interval of three years elapsed, during which Ahab made fruitless efforts to lay hands on the prophet, and the land was utterly wasted with famine. A parched land and a famished population wrought at last a salutary change. Elijah, miraculously preserved during the famine, appeared suddenly before the king, and challenged the priests of Baal to a trial of their respective faiths. He summoned the priests of Baal, made his solemn appeal to Heaven, and brought down fire on the sacrifice. The momentous issue was decided. In an access of

zealous fury, the people fell upon the false prophets at Elijah's bidding, and slaughtered them mercilessly at the brook Kishon. Ahab acquiesced in all this; he appeared, as it were, to take part in it; he was, one might almost think, reconciled to Elijah; the heavens were opened; the prophet was acknowledged; all was rejoicing, all forgiveness and mercy. Ahab went up to eat and drink; his chariot was ready; Elijah himself attended him, and he entered Jezreel.

5. "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword." A cloud of blackness gathered on the queen's face, and her eyes flashed as the vivid lightning. At the suggestion of submission to the popular judgment, such a glance of ineffable contempt darted upon Ahab that it transformed his very thoughts; and in a moment all appeared to him in a new and opposite light. Though he had felt the curse of God upon the land; though he had seen the fire descend from God; though he had witnessed, without the power to prevent it, the destruction of his prophets; though he had heard the storm of wind, and been out in the pelting storm of rain; though he knew that the hand of God was upon Elijah, nevertheless he feared his wife more than Elijah, or his prophets, or Baal, or God—more than all of them put together—and meekly stood by while she sent her messenger to threaten death to the Tishbite. He allowed the only man who could help him to be driven with threats from his court.

¶ "Le mystère de l'existence, c'est le rapport de nos erreurs avec nos peines." Do you not understand that? It is the kind of connexion which is the mystery. Crime is less severely treated than error. A weakness of the heart produces more misery, more both to self and others, and is more severely chastised, than a deliberate wickedness. It has often made me ponder. Look at weak Eli, only a little too indulgent. The result—a country's dishonour and defeat, two profligates, a death-bed of a widow and mother on which despair sits, and the death of a wretched old man, for whom it would have been a mercy if his neck had been broken before his heart. Then, again, Pilate, only irresolution—the result the ruin of the Holiest.[1]

[1] *Life and Letters of the Rev. F. W. Robertson*, 239.

II.

Ahab's Glory.

1. It was in this interval of partial and transient reformation that Ahab, by Divine encouragement, defeated the king of Syria and repelled his invasion. Ahab's military career shows him to have been a warrior of considerable prowess. Samaria had for some time been closely invested by the Syrian army under Benhadad, or more probably Hadadezer (*Dadidri*), if we follow the Assyrian annals. Of the defeats sustained by Israel prior to this siege we have no information. Benhadad (Hadadezer) made the insolent demand of the Israelitish king, in the extremity of the latter, that Syrian envoys should search the royal palace and the houses of Ahab's servants. This was refused by Ahab with the unanimous approval of his people and their elders. To the arrogant menace of the Syrian, the king of Israel replied in the proverbial phrase: "Let not him that girdeth on his armour boast himself as he that putteth it off." Benhadad at once ordered the engines of war (LXX "lines of circumvallation") to be placed against the city. Beyond this he did nothing, but gave himself up to voluptuous ease in his camp. Ahab at the head of seven thousand men suddenly attacked the Syrians and completely discomfited them. In the following year Benhadad renewed the campaign. He attributed his recent defeat to the difficult nature of the hill country which surrounded Samaria. The god of Israel, his officers told him, was a god of the hills: "but let us," they said, "fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." The Syrian king accordingly pitched his camp in the open valley near Aphek. After an interval of seven days, a battle took place, and again the Syrians were routed with heavy loss. After this victory, however, for some reason unknown to us, Ahab completely changed his policy. He received, with marked friendliness, Benhadad and his followers, who abjectly sued for their lives, and he was even induced to conclude a treaty with Syria.

Very different was this treatment of Benhadad, who, a few years before, had so long and severely oppressed the community of God, from that which had been looked for at Ahab's hands by

many a prophet who could not yet forget the sternness of the ancient community towards such conquered heathens. And, indeed, simply on the ground of ordinary judgment, many a clear eye could perceive how unfounded was Ahab's hope of good faith on the part of such an enemy. The result actually proved what they expected. Benhadad did not observe the conditions of peace, *e.g.*, he would not surrender the town of Ramoth in Gilead, the war for the recovery of which, three years later, proved fatal to Ahab himself.

¶ Like many of the east-Jordan sites, the identification of the famous city of Ramoth-Gilead, which was the scene of so many battles between the Hebrews and their northern foes, is uncertain. On the whole, the most probable site is that suggested by Principal G. A. Smith, of Aberdeen University. He identifies it with the present city of Gadara. This town lies one thousand one hundred and ninety-four feet above the sea-level, on a bold plateau which runs out from the hills of Gilead. This height, two miles wide, and at least four miles in length from east to west, is bounded on the north by the deep valley of the Yarmuk, on the west by the Jordan, four and one-half miles away and over one thousand eight hundred feet below, and on the south by the Wady el-Arab, which cuts a deep gorge into the Gileadite hills. It is due south of Aphek, where was fought the great battle between the Hebrews and the Arameans under Ahab, and is on one of the chief highways which lead up from the Jordan through Arbela to join the pilgrim highway to Damascus and Arabia. It is, therefore, the chief gateway and at the same time the natural fortress which guards northern Gilead. On the wide level plateaus about there is ample room for the manœuvring of chariots, and an important road leads directly from it across the Jordan to Ahab's northern capital.[1]

2. Ahab knew well that the faithfulness of the kings and people of God was shown in cutting off those whom they were commissioned to destroy. But he made friends for his own interest with the king of Syria, whom he had overcome, and sat with him in his own chariot. Perhaps Ahab wanted to show himself a magnanimous as well as a mighty monarch. He wanted to pose as a man who, having life and death in his grasp, could dispense life when death was expected. Benhadad cleverly played upon this

[1] C. F. Kent, *Biblical Geography and History*, 174.

vanity; and so, without considering counsel or country, Ahab exercised his royal prerogative, and let his enemy go free. He had victory given to him, and final deliverance secured, if only he had been willing, in faith, to follow up and follow out the advantage he had gained. But he would be wiser—more polite or more pitiful—than God. He would make terms of compromise, drive a profitable bargain, and, in consideration of a merely nominal and apparent concession,—for the Syrian king soon showed he was not in earnest,—let the oppressor go in peace.

3. Whatever may have been Ahab's motives, his conduct gave great offence to the prophets, one of whom expressed by a symbolic action the Divine displeasure which the king had incurred (1 Kings xx. 35–43). It is possible, however, that both Ahab and Benhadad recognized at length the necessity of bringing to a conclusion hostilities which weakened their power of joint resistance to Assyria.

¶ Under baleful Atheisms, Mammonisms, Joe-Manton Dilettantisms, with their appropriate Cants and Idolisms, and whatsoever scandalous rubbish obscures and all but extinguishes the soul of man,—religion now is; its Laws, written if not on stone tables, yet on the Azure of Infinitude, in the inner heart of God's Creation, certain as Life, certain as Death! I say the Laws are there, and thou shalt not disobey them. It were better for thee not. Better a hundred deaths than yes. Terrible "penalties," withal, if thou still need "penalties," are there for disobeying.[1]

III.

Ahab's Covetousness.

King Ahab has reached the summit of his prosperity. The cities of Israel which his father had lost are restored; Damascus itself owns his power. He has indeed had a series of successes such as had not been given to any king since Solomon's time—and then there comes the little episode of Naboth's vineyard, showing how the great man who had grasped so much, who had had his own way in so many things, worked himself up into a

[1] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, Bk. iii. chap. xv.

condition of self-torture and indignation and pouting and fretting because there was one little thing which he could not grasp, and how out of this there grew an awful tragedy.

1. Close to the gardens of Ahab, by his new palace at Jezreel, was a vineyard belonging to Naboth, which the king coveted, to make of it a "garden of herbs." He offered to buy it of Naboth, or to exchange it for another. "The Lord forbid it me," was the answer, "that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee." It was the natural answer of a free Israelite, who in the spirit of the Mosaic Law regarded an inherited property as a sacred trust; and even Ahab did not think it possible to override such a refusal. He returned to his palace "heavy and displeased," sulked, and refused to eat.

It goes without saying that it was Ahab's true part to dismiss the coveted object from his thoughts and accept the situation. But he took the temptation to his heart and made a grievance of what was no more than a perfectly intelligible and legitimate difficulty; and where an entirely honest man would have resolutely put the thought and desire from him, he allowed it to lodge in his heart until all its sweetness turned to gall and bitterness, and he was just in the mood to lend an ear to any dishonest and wicked suggestion. He had wronged Naboth already in his heart; it was a little thing that he should go further and wrong him in fact.

¶ Just as a pilgrim journeying along a road on which he has never been before thinks that each house he sees in the distance is the inn, and, finding that it is not, sets his hopes on the next, and so on with house after house, until at last he comes to the inn; in like manner the soul of man, as soon as she enters upon the new and untried pathway of this life, directs her eyes towards the goal of the Supreme Good, and whatever she sees with any appearance of good in it, thinks that is the object of her quest. And because at first her knowledge is imperfect, owing to inexperience and lack of instruction, things of little worth appear to her of great worth, and so she begins by fixing her desires upon these. Hence we see children first of all set their hearts on an apple; then, at a later stage, they want a bird; then, later, fine clothes; then a horse, and then a mistress; then they want money, at first a little, then a great deal, and at last a gold-mine. And this happens because in none of these things does a man find

what he is in search of, but thinks he will come upon it a little further on.[1]

> How Ahab longs! Ahab must be possest
> Of Naboth's Vineyard, or can find no rest:
> His tongue must second his unlawful eye:
> Ahab must sue; and Naboth must deny:
> Ahab grows sullen; he can eat no Bread:
> His Body prostrates on his restless Bed:
> Unlawful Lust immoderate often brings
> A loathing in the use of lawful things:
> Ahab's desire must not be withstood,
> It must be purchas'd, though with Naboth's Blood;
> Witness must be suborn'd: Naboth must lie
> Open to Law; must be condemn'd; and die:
> His Goods must be confiscate to the Crown;
> Now Ahab's pleas'd; The Vineyard's now his own:
> Unlawful Pleasures, when they jostle further
> Than ordinary bounds, oft end in murther.
> Me thinks, the Grapes that cluster from that Vine,
> Should (being prest) afford more blood than wine.[2]

2. Very probably Ahab did not meditate any serious misconduct. He evidently had no thought of forcing Naboth to yield to his desires, or of laying violent hands either upon himself or upon his property. Here, as elsewhere, the man has still a troublesome conscience checking an evil will. But Jezebel was not burdened with any such conscientious regard for the rights of others; and when she learned what the cause of her husband's moping was, she bitterly taunted him with his scrupulous timidity, and intimated that she would make short work of Naboth and his inheritance. Jezebel maintained her power over Ahab by pandering to the worst that was in him. She was infinitely more daring and reckless than he. She possessed herself of the royal seal, and wrote a letter to the "elders and nobles" of Jezreel, who evidently formed the local court for the administration of justice. She ordered them to "proclaim a fast" (as if some great crime had been committed), and then to procure two false witnesses who would accuse Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king. The servile magistrates carried out the hideous travesty of justice.

[1] Dante, *Convivio*, iv. 12 (trans. by Paget Toynbee).
[2] Francis Quarles, *Divine Fancies*, ii. 36.

Naboth was condemned and stoned to death, and apparently his sons suffered with him. News was sent to the queen, and she in triumph bade her husband go now and take possession of the vineyard.

3. One might have thought that Ahab would have expressed some condemnation of this awful conspiracy, culminating in such a tragic horror. But no! Like many in modern times, though he was restrained by his conscience from committing murder himself, he had no scruple in availing himself of the results of such a crime when perpetrated by another. He flattered himself that though he had no hand in Naboth's death, he might, as well as another, "receive the benefit of his dying." So, summoning Jehu and Bidkar to accompany him, he drove down from Samaria to Jezreel.

No sooner did he enter the vineyard than Elijah appeared before him, suddenly, abruptly, and mysteriously, as before, and for the last time. This time a further truth had to be vindicated. Not only was Jehovah the living God, who could have no rival in the nature-deities of Canaan or Tyre; He was the God of character as well as of power. Eternal righteousness Himself in His own nature, He demanded righteousness from His worshippers, even from kings.

If the religious feeling of the true worshippers of Jehovah had already been deeply outraged by the position taken up by Ahab towards the worship of Baal, now the whole nation's sense of justice is in like manner outraged by this base murder in the name of the law. Again it is Elijah who gives clear and frank expression to what is exciting the mass of the people so profoundly. At the very instant when, on the day after the judicial murder, Ahab is just on the point of taking possession of the field which has by law fallen to him, Elijah bursts in upon him with the words: "Surely I have seen yester-night the blood of Naboth and of his children: to thee will I requite it on this field." The fate of the dynasty in the public judgment of the nation is thereby sealed, if Elijah possessed at all the authority which the accounts we have ascribe to him. So far as Ahab himself was concerned, these words were to find their fulfilment in his last battles with the Syrians which end with the death of the king.

4. The incident is instructive to the student of Hebrew religion, as it illustrates the contrast in the attitude of Phœnician as compared with Hebrew religion towards social morality. In the words of W. R. Smith: "The religion of Jehovah put morality on a far sounder basis than any other religion did, because in it the righteousness of Jehovah as a God enforcing the known laws of morality was conceived as absolute" (*The Prophets of Israel*, 73). It is more than doubtful whether Ahab really comprehended the religious issues. He regarded Elijah as a mischievous fanatic, "a troubler of Israel" bent on wrecking the imperial schemes of aggrandizement based on alliance with Phœnicia at the expense of Syria, and his hatred hissed out in the words, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Elijah answered, "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord." He then foretold the awful end of Ahab, the destruction of his house, and the subsequent fearful death of Jezebel.

¶ When a man fancies that God's prophet is his enemy, and dreams that his finding him out is a calamity and a loss, that man may be certain that something worse will find him out some day. His sins will find him out, and that is worse than the prophet's coming. Picture to yourself this—a human spirit shut up, with the companionship of its forgotten and dead transgressions. There is a resurrection of acts as well as of bodies. Think what it will be for a man to sit surrounded by that ghastly company, the ghosts of his own sins!—and as each forgotten fault and buried badness comes, silent and sheeted, into that awful society, and sits itself down there, think of him greeting each with the question, "Thou too? What! are ye all here? Hast *thou* found me, O mine enemy?" and from each bloodless spectral lip there tolls out the answer, the knell of his life, "I *have* found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord."[1]

5. Elijah's words, not forgotten for nearly twenty years by Jehu, who merely overheard them, sank like lead into the heart of Ahab, and took from him all the joy of his new possession, so that "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." There was yet some sense of justice in him; and these outward symbols of

[1] Alexander Maclaren.

sorrow were not hypocritical. He did not feign the feelings of which they were the signs. He was humiliated. He was sad. If it had been to be done again, he would not have allowed Naboth to be put to death. For so much let us give him credit. But though his repentance was sincere, as far as it went, yet it did not go far enough. He feared the punishment of his sin more than he hated the sin itself. There was no word of restitution. There was no change in the general current of his life. And yet, because he humbled himself, the Lord spoke of it to Elijah (as friend speaks to friend), and declared that the predicted evil should fall in his son's days, and not in the days of Ahab. In a word, Ahab was reprieved, not pardoned. In the heart of Ahab there was a sense of better things, and that sense was recognized and blessed.

¶ Think of the infinite patience of God's love! Again and again, and yet again, does God move our souls within us, and once more give us at least feeling enough to be impressed with what we hear, and with what we see others do, and with what we remember that we ourselves resolved. With inexhaustible patience is the message of the Gospel, the promise of forgiveness, the offer of love, repeated in our hearing, whispered by our consciences, made to thrill through our hearts. And, in spite of sins so often repeated that we can hardly believe them forgiven, we still hear the ever-renewed call to repentance. How soon would our own patience have been worn out if a brother had thus repeatedly sinned against us! Look back at your life and at your besetting sin, and think, if that had been an offence by one of your friends against yourself, how surely your patience with his fault would have been exhausted long before this. And yet God's patience is not worn out with you, or you would not feel even the wish to return to Him again. Nay, our patience with ourselves is sooner worn out than God's patience with us. Sooner do we say, "It's of no use; I cannot help it; I must give up this unavailing struggle"; than does He say, "This is an unprofitable tree; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"[1]

[1] Archbishop Temple.

IV.

Ahab's Death.

1. It was three years after the murder of Naboth that the first part of Elijah's curse, in its modified form, fell on the royal house. The scene is given at length, apparently to bring before us the gradual working-out of the catastrophe. The Syrian war, which forms the background of the whole of the history of Omri's dynasty, furnished the occasion. To recover the fortress of Ramoth-gilead was the object of the battle. The kings of Judah and Israel were united for the grand effort. The alliance was confirmed by the marriage of Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, with Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat. The names of the two royal families were intermixed for the first time since the separation of the kingdoms. Jehoshaphat came down in state to Samaria, and Ahab proposed to him that they should go up to Ramoth-gilead, and take it out of the hand of the king of Syria, who was unjustly retaining it under his own government. Jehoshaphat asked that the prophets might be consulted before the attack on Syria. Four hundred of them were assembled, and all with one voice promised success. The king of Judah apparently mistrusted their glib optimism, and inquired whether there was any other prophet of Jehovah besides these. One more there was, Micaiah the son of Imlah, but he was a prophet of evil and hated by Ahab. He was summoned at Jehoshaphat's request, and arrived just as the prophets were giving a great display of sycophancy before the two kings who sat in front of the gate of Samaria. Micaiah at first, with evident irony, assured the king that his campaign would prosper. But when adjured in Jehovah's name to speak the truth, he boldly delivered his unpalatable message: "I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the Lord said, These have no master; let them return every man to his house in peace." The intrepid Micaiah was at once arrested, and cast into prison; the self-deluded Ahab had no need for a prophet of the truth.

2. In the battle that followed, under the walls of Ramoth-gilead, everything centred on the foredoomed destruction of

Ahab. Unwilling to believe, and yet superstitiously afraid of, the prophet's word, he disguised himself before going into battle. It was in vain; an archer of the Syrians aimed at him, not knowing who he was, and inflicted a mortal wound. He felt it his death-wound; but with a nobler spirit than had appeared in his life, he would not have it disclosed, lest the army should be discouraged. At even he died, and his death was the sign for a general retreat of Israel. His body was brought to Samaria for burial, and the historian notes the exact fulfilment of Elijah's grim prophecy: "And they washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood."

Thus died on the field of battle the most active and energetic warrior who ever sat on the throne of Northern Israel. Ahab's courage in battle and his sagacity as a diplomat are unquestioned; but his ambition and his attitude towards his subjects were those of a tyrant. His latter days witnessed the beginning of the decay of that kingdom for which he had sacrificed the nobler religious ideals of his race. His supreme mistake was in trampling upon the liberties of his subjects and in disregarding Jehovah's claim to the complete and absolute loyalty of His people. The good is often the enemy of the best. In the pursuit of a worthy, but not the noblest ambition revealed to his race and age, Ahab sinned and brought ultimate disaster upon his house and nation.

¶ On several occasions Napoleon declared that the morality of the Christian religion was merely that of Socrates and Plato. Sometimes he expressed doubts whether Jesus Christ ever existed: and he declared emphatically his preference of Mohammedanism to Christianity for the Eastern peoples. Clearly this preference was founded largely on military motives. He seems to have considered that Christianity made men afraid of death; and he once said to Gourgaud that if he had believed in a God who dealt out retribution, he would have been afraid in war. Mohammedanism, on the contrary, was a fine fighting creed. At bottom, then, Napoleon viewed religion as a political force, capable of rousing men to fiercely aggressive activity, or of consolidating order after a time of chaos, and at all times serving to console the poor for the hardships of their lot. It mattered not whether they understood religious services. On one occasion he declared that Roman Catholicism was better than Anglicanism, because in the former the people did not understand what was sung at Vespers and

only looked on. It was better not to throw light upon these things.[1]

V.

Ahab's Character.

1. That Ahab's rule was firm though despotic, and maintained the military traditions inaugurated by Omri, is indicated by the Moabite Stone, which informs us (lines 7, 8) that Omri and his son ruled over the land of Mehdeba (conquered by the former) for forty years. It was not till the concluding part of Ahab's reign, when he was occupied with his Syrian wars, that Moab rose in insurrection. The historian must not fail to take due note of the Judaic tendency of the narrative in 1 Kings xviii.–xxii., which paints the life of Ahab in sombre hues. There was another side to his reign, which the historian only briefly alludes to: "Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house which he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?" If we consider him from the political point of view, he stands out very prominently amongst kings. Few were greater, more successful, grander than he. He came to a distracted kingdom surrounded by enemies, and he left it in a state of considerable prosperity. He added city to city, country to country. He defeated again and again the great enemies who advanced against him. And in his national life he was magnificent. Here he built a temple, and there a lordly palace. His ivory palace was one of the wonders of the world. And so, according to the judgment of men, he was a great man, a wise king, a hero to be had in remembrance.

2. But it is only the moral issues of history that are really of permanent importance. We have to look at Ahab's life, not at his acts: not at his alliances, not at his victories, not at his luxury and his magnificence, not at his ivory house. We have to look at the man, brought up without God, living in open rebellion against God, striven with for at least twenty-two years, knowing

[1] J. H. Rose, *The Personality of Napoleon*, 218.

the truth, and yet selling himself to work wickedness, and at last dying by the hand of God in the open day.

But for Jezebel, Ahab had not subjected himself to this dreadful doom. He was all his life alternately under the influence of Jezebel or Elijah, under the influence of the world or religion. He was ambitious; he was brave; he had in him many elements of nobleness, for do we not see him again and again listening to the voice of the prophet, attending to his warnings, submitting to his stern public rebukes, standing silent whilst eight hundred of his prophets and priests of Baal were slain, repenting in sackcloth and ashes his evil words in consenting to the death of Naboth the Jezreelite? Moreover, where his conscience was clean he could be bold. But he was less daring and decided in evil than Jezebel, just because he had more conscience than she. When he wedded her, he thought only of the glory of his Zidonian alliance, and the strengthening of his hands against his Syrian foes; but she made him participator in a crime which drew down on his house the curse of extermination, and poisoned the happiness of his remaining years upon the earth. Thus the very means which he used to secure the glory of his kingdom and the permanence of his dynasty proved the ruin of both.

¶ It is vain for man to seek protection against the doom of heaven and the just penalty of his crimes. There is a weak spot in every armour. Underneath the insignia of royalty, beneath the hairy tunic of the religious recluse, under the coloured robes of prosperity, and the sober dress of respectability, there is the sin-conscious, sin-stained heart that admits of no disguise and suffers no escape. So it was with Ahab. His sin had found him out. He was given his chances, and he had lost them for ever. For golden opportunities, when let pass, never return. A stray arrow from a foeman's hand revenged the blood of the slaughtered saints, the murder of Naboth, the profanity of the court, and the sorceries of his wife, who did not long survive him, and his works and kingdom were soon swept away.[1]

3. In spite of his courage and his genius, which made him a great king, Ahab was pre-eminently a weak man. Indeed the most prominent influence throughout his whole life is the working of a self-deceiving conscience. His sin is ever as a serpent that hides its head: it has some cloak or shelter, rather

[1] F. R. M. Hitchcock, *Hebrew Types*, 138.

than being of that open and bold character which defies God: "heavy and displeased," he broods over sinful wishes; and is glad to reap fruits of that wickedness which he did not dare by himself to commit. If the worship of Baal was introduced, it was Jezebel's doing, he might say, not his own; if the prophets of God were slain, if Elijah was persecuted unto the death, it was his wife, and not Ahab; if Naboth was slain by false witnesses, and under the pretence of a religious fast, it was Jezebel's deed. When he goes forth to the battle at Ramoth-gilead, there is the same self-deceiving hypocrisy; he sits on the throne with the king of Judah, and in a solemn and religious manner has brought before him the prophets to consult them; but there is one prophet that he avoids, and only at the requirement of the king of Judah will he meet him, or face the eye of God. This double-dealing is the very thing which Scripture condemns, as proving that there is not in the heart the love of God. And what is the final verdict of Scripture upon him? "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to do that which was evil"; "Ahab did yet more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

¶ On the occasion of his visit to London in 1824, Carlyle spent an evening at Highgate with Coleridge, then at the height of his fame. To his brother John, Carlyle thus described his impression of the poet and metaphysician: "I have seen many curiosities; not the least of them I reckon Coleridge the Kantian metaphysician and quondam Lake poet. He is a kind, good soul, full of religion and affection, and poetry and animal magnetism. His cardinal sin is that he wants *will*. He has no resolution. He shrinks from pain or labour in any of its shapes. His very attitude bespeaks this. He never straightens his knee-joints. He stoops with his fat, ill-shapen shoulders, and in walking he does not tread but shovel and slide. My father would call it 'skluiffing.' His eyes have a look of anxious impotence. He *would* do all with his heart, but he knows he dares not. The conversation of the man is much as I anticipated—a forest of thoughts, some true, many false, more *part* dubious, all of them ingenious in some degree, often in a high degree. But there is no method in his talk: he wanders like a man sailing among many currents, whithersoever his lazy mind directs him."[1]

[1] J. A. Froude, *Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1835*, i. 222.

Oft as I act, or think, or speak,
  Comes battle of two Wills within,
This like an infant poor and weak,
  That like a Demon strong for sin.

This labours, flutteringly alive,
  As if a cold spark went and came
That other doth against it drive
  Red torrents of devouring flame.

Yet, mark th' exceeding Power of God,
  How like a rock His Promise stands—
That Demon to the dust is trod,
  Slain by the feeble Infant hands.

That fluttering life so faint and cold,
  That one pale spark of pure desire
Sun-like arises, and behold!
  God's Rainbow in the falls of fire.

O Mystery far beyond my thought!
  I trembled on the brink of Hell:
Into what Paradise am I caught!
  What Heavenly anthems round me swell![1]

[1] Philip S. Worsley, *Poems and Translations.*

JEZEBEL.

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JEZEBEL.

Ahab . . . whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.—1 Kings xxi. 25.

1. The outstanding feature in Ahab's reign of twenty-seven years was the persistent effort of Queen Jezebel to oust the worship of Jehovah and establish that of the Tyrian Baal. This divinity, whose proper name was Melkart, and who probably represented the sun, must not be confused with the local Baalim of the Canaanites, or with the corrupt Jehovah-worship of the Hebrews. He was worshipped with pomp and splendour, with rites of bloodshed and immorality. With him was associated the worship of Asherah, a female divinity, represented by a wooden pillar. This latter cult was no new introduction, but it seemed to flourish side by side with that of Baal, under the fanatical care of Jezebel.

2. Jezebel was a heathen princess, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Phœnicia—that strip of country, stretching along the seashore in the north of Palestine, which included such well-known mercantile cities as Tyre and Sidon. Ethbaal and Omri the father of Ahab were comparatively near neighbours, and it was of some importance politically that there should be an alliance between the two kingdoms; they would be able to help each other when trouble came to either people; and it was of special advantage to the house of Israel, because it gave them not only a powerful ally but a convenient seaport for their trade. It was thus that Jezebel came into the stream of Israel's history. She became the wife of Ahab, the first of that proud, heathen Canaanite people to bear the title of Queen of Israel.

Jezebel inherited unusual ability and energy, a strong religious zeal and those Oriental despotic ideals which hesitated at no crime in attaining personal ends. As queen she had the right to establish at the Hebrew court a temple and priesthood for the worship of her native God, Baal Melkart. It was also easy

for a woman of her ability gradually to increase the number of the priests and the splendour of the ritual at the Baal temple, until they overshadowed those of the older native sanctuaries. To an agricultural people, the worship of Baal, the native Canaanite god of fertility, also offered many strong attractions; and its licentious rites appealed powerfully to their baser instincts. It was almost inevitable, therefore, that in such an atmosphere and under royal patronage, this kindred worship should flourish and attract many followers.

3. Posterity, no doubt, has with one consent denounced Queen Jezebel. But Jezebel herself must have been thought a benefactor by many in Israel. The prophets who sat at her table would talk gratefully of her splendid hospitality. Many a lover of the fine arts would take pride in the Phœnician princess who encouraged Ahab in his building of cities and ivory palaces. Statesmen who valued an alliance with foreign powers would speak approvingly of the queen who secured for Israel the friendship of Tyre and Sidon. So-called patriots, who looked with jealousy upon any traces of their former connexion with Judah, would be glad to see the worship of Baal substituted for that of the calves in Bethel and Dan, which were supposed to represent the God of both Judah and Israel. Timid men, who remembered the intestine dissensions which resulted in the death of Elah and of Zimri, would rejoice at the spectacle of a strong government, and would be at no loss to detect the source and secret of its strength; for there was now a spirit in the councils of the throne which knew how to govern the kingdom of Israel. Jezebel was a woman of superior mind, uncommon astuteness, and great strength of will. Her father, Ethbaal, was the high priest of Baal. He was a man of singular power and attainments; he dictated the religious policy of Phœnicia. It matters not that the steps of his throne were slippery with his brother's blood; he was, according to his standards, an eminently religious man. And Jezebel was a true daughter of her father—steeped in the idolatrous spirit of the priest-king, and like him totally devoid of all sense of the rights of others; unscrupulous, asserting her own will at all costs, ruthlessly removing whatever stood between her and her goal.

In a kingdom which had no firm foundation, the alliance with

a Tyrian princess might easily prove exceedingly dangerous. From the times of David and Solomon, it is true, many treaties had been concluded between Phœnicia and Israel, and close bonds of friendship formed; and Tyre gladly sought to promote its own safety by remaining allied with its more immediate and powerful neighbour, while it naturally became the more indifferent towards Judah. It was, however, at the same time the special business of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes to restore the ancient rigidness of the nationality of Israel; a Canaanitish princess was necessarily, therefore, regarded with suspicion. Jezebel, moreover, belonging to a line which gained its crown by violence, was full of self-will, thirst for power, and arrogance. With perverse pride, she looked down upon a people whose religion she neither understood nor respected. Her influence over the king became only too great.

I.

Baal-Worship.

1. The first indication of Jezebel's influence was the establishment of the Phœnician worship on a grand scale at the court of Ahab. To some extent this was the natural consequence of the depravation of the public worship of Jehovah by Jeroboam, which seems under Omri to have taken a more directly idolatrous turn. But still the change from a symbolical worship of the one true God, with the innocent rites of sacrifice and prayer, to the cruel and licentious worship of the Phœnician divinities, was a prodigious step downwards, and left traces in Northern Palestine which no subsequent reformations were able entirely to obliterate. Two sanctuaries were established, one at Samaria and the other at Jezreel; four hundred and fifty priests of Baal were to be found connected with the sanctuary at Samaria, four hundred at Jezreel under the special care of Jezebel, at whose table they fed.

The religion of Israel, no matter how corrupted a form of the worship of Jerusalem, was free from sensual taint. The religion of Jehovah had placed morality on a sound basis, because the laws of morality were regarded as the commandments of an absolutely righteous God. Therefore that religion was free from all the immoral accompaniments and indecent associations with which the Phœnician cult of Baal, which was practically nature worship,

had always been identified. These licentious features of worship, with which the northern tribes had become more or less familiar owing to their proximity to Tyre and Sidon, were openly introduced by Jezebel. At her request, Ahab had permitted the cult of Baal to supersede the worship of the true God. At her request, he had permitted the *Kedeshim* and *Kedeshoth*, male and female attendants, to be introduced into the holy places, and the prophets of the Lord to be exterminated. Deeper and deeper into iniquity the fanatic queen had led him, until he surpassed in evil all the evil kings of an evil dynasty.

¶ Most signally of all, abhorrence of evil comes out in Him of whom it is written, "Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." It is this, you will observe, which is avouched of Him, namely, that He *hated* wickedness; it was not merely that He kept Himself aloof from it, passed it by, had nothing to do with it; but that He *hated* it. His whole nature was in active and continual warfare with it. "Get thee behind me, Satan," uttered once to the adversary in the wilderness, was the voice of His heart at every instant, was the keynote to which His whole life was set. The zeal of His Father's house consumed Him, so that, though once only, or at most twice, He may have driven out the profane intruders from the Temple of His Father, yet the spirit which dictated these outbreaks of holy zeal was the spirit in which His whole life was lived, His whole ministry was accomplished. Ever near to His heart was the holy indignation which He felt at the dishonour done to His Father's name; the holy hatred which He felt, not of the world, for that was the object of His tenderest pity, but of the pollutions of the world, in the midst of which He was moving; and in His entire exemption from which pollutions He was "separate from sinners," though united to them in everything besides.[1]

2. Up to this point, the effect of the heathen worship may not have been much greater than it had been in Jerusalem under the care of Solomon's foreign wives. But what had been tolerated in the days of Solomon now met with strenuous opposition. To the great prophet Elijah, Jehovah was a jealous God; there was no longer room in Israel for the worship of Baal; there must be no "halting between two opinions," but a definite choice of the one or the other deity. The attitude assumed by Elijah and those

[1] Archbishop Trench.

like-minded with him, provoked the resentment of Jezebel, in whose hands Ahab seems to have been little more than a tool. The woman was in earnest; she was for no half-measures. Possessed of all the fierce fanaticism of her race, she was persuaded of the truth of her religion, and determined to establish it in her adopted land at any cost. Apart from Elijah's opposition, the religion of Jehovah was a continual rebuke to a spirit like Jezebel's. Its holy requirements awakened her hatred of God; its spiritual worship was intensely offensive and burdensome to her. She could not brook the sight of those who sincerely and truly represented it. She got rid of them by banishment and death, until Elijah could exclaim, "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

The issue of the conflict on Mount Carmel and the slaughter of the prophets of Baal, from which Elijah hoped so much, served only to augment the persecuting zeal of the queen. The very fires of hell were kindled in her fanatical heart; and a famishing thirst for blood in revenge for the blood of the priests of Baal. Rather would she that the whole kingdom should have perished by the famine than have witnessed such a triumph for Jehovah. The very thought of Elijah enjoying his proud triumph was to her insupportable; and that he should quietly sleep upon it was maddening. In the eager impatience of her desire for vengeance, she determined to spoil his feast, and sent him a thorn for his pillow. And with uncalculating passion, she hurried off a minister with the terrible message and oath, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time." She refused to acknowledge the sovereignty of Jehovah, even when proved by such convincing signs as those which Elijah had given, and she vainly imagined that, if she could only destroy the prophet's life, she would also annihilate the cause with which he was identified. She had not herself been a spectator of the descending fire upon Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel; and, with the true spirit of the sceptic, who will not believe the eyes of others, and, unless it suits his own purposes, will not believe his own, she would not acknowledge that any miracle had been wrought.

Her rage knew no bounds. She was committed against the truth by upbringing, by prejudice, by disposition, by the interests

of a wicked life, by the determination to rule Israel according to her own mind and liking. Strong of will and strong of mind, she was little likely to yield even upon the report of the doings of Jehovah. That would have overthrown all the plans of government, and have implied the renunciation of her own will to such an extent as would have seemed to her the abandonment of all that made government worthy of her powers. And, moreover, that this man Elijah should have presumed to slay the prophets of the divinity she worshipped was an offence of so audacious a character that, instead of breaking her will into submission to the righteous God, whose act of judgment it really was, it aroused all the hostility of her nature, and concentrated her purpose of vengeance upon him. Her threat to the prophet has a certain audacity of frankness almost approaching generosity. She will give her victim fair play. This woman was "magnificent in sin"; and Elijah quailed before her and fled for his life.

¶ We may probably accept as largely accurate the self-representation of the queen delineated in these words, placed, by the author of *The Days of Jezebel*, in her own mouth:

> I can act
> As fits my father's daughter. Tolerance
> Of those who will not tolerate, is sin
> Against all toleration.[1]

¶ Woman, the gentlest of all creatures, is apt to become masterful and even tyrannical. This, because she is a creature in whose composition emotion dominates, and emotion, when highly stimulated, becomes passion, and passion spurns all reasonable limitation and becomes tyrannical. Besides, there are women with more than ordinary firm will and persistent purpose; these, when winged by the passion which is natural to the sex, become intolerant, masterful, and more tyrannical than men. If they love strongly, they also hate strongly, and fly directly to the mark of their abhorrence, like an arrow from a bow. Qualification, to the intense action of the impassioned soul, is treachery, and contradiction is treason. Like a stormy wind they will have their sweep and ignore all contraries. And from this predominance of the emotional element, it seems plain that, though she may try many things and succeed in most, she is, with her normal outfit, materially incapacitated from being a statesman or a judge.[2]

[1] H. E. Lewis, in *Women of the Bible*, 108.
[2] *The Day-Book of John Stuart Blackie*, 143.

II.

The Murder of Naboth.

1. The darkest stain upon the memory of Jezebel was left by the atrocious crime she perpetrated in order to procure for her husband the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. Ahab, the king, despite his magnificence, his many cities, his famous palace of ivory, was a miserable man; for he had set his heart on one poor vineyard, and could not have it. Naboth, its possessor, would not sell his patrimony. In utter wretchedness this pitiable king took to his bed, turned his face to the wall, and refused food—the very type of the man whom insidious temptation finds an easy victim. His wife entered, and learnt the cause of his sadness—learnt it to scoff at him.

¶ Like all peoples worthy of freedom, the Israelites were intensely attached to their ancestral properties. Their laws made it very difficult to alienate landed estates, and provided for their retention by the family of their holders. As a rule, the land was occupied by small proprietors jealously attached to their holdings. This class was strongly supported by public opinion and by the prophetic order. Any attempt to seize an estate by violence was certain to be fiercely resented, especially as the land was considered to belong to Jehovah, and to be held by its owner as a gift from Him. Ahab was aware of this when he tried to induce Naboth to sell him his vineyard.[1]

2. Jezebel has been the type of female wickedness through the ages; but especially is she the type of the wickedness which irrevocably ruins the morally weak, and, while they are hesitating on the brink of sin, gives the fatal impulse that hurls them into the abyss. This masterful princess had come from a land where royalty was all-powerful, and had no restraints of conscience. Her character was strong, firm, unmalleable; a diamond heart, cold, passionless, cruel, and sharp as a dagger's edge. The words had not left Ahab's lips a moment before her plan was made: "Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." It is the same contrast—true to nature—that we know so well in

[1] F. J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Biblical History of the Hebrews*, 240.

Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, where the feebler resolution of the man has been urged to the last crime by the bolder and more relentless spirit of the woman. She wrote the warrant in Ahab's name; she gave the hint to the chiefs and nobles of the city. An assembly was called, at the head of which Naboth, by virtue of his high position, was placed. There, against him, as he so stood, the charge of treason was brought according to the forms of the Jewish law. The two or three necessary witnesses were produced, and set before him. The sentence was pronounced. The whole family was involved in the ruin.

Everything was done by the subservient elders of Jezreel exactly as she had directed. Their fawning readiness to carry out her vile commands is the deadliest incidental proof of the corruption which she and her crew of alien idolaters had wrought in Israel. On that very evening Jezebel received the message, "Naboth is stoned, and is dead." By the savage law of those days his innocent sons were involved in his overthrow, and his property, left without heirs, reverted by confiscation to the crown.

3. Jezebel received the news of Naboth's death with undisguised satisfaction. It was nothing to her that God's name had been profaned; that religion had been dishonoured; that justice had been outraged; or that innocent blood had been shed. She had obtained her object; for the property of those condemned to death for blasphemy reverted to the crown; and she hastened to carry the good tidings to her husband. "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead."

Caring only for the gratification of his wish, heedless of the means employed, hastily and joyously at early dawn the king arose to seize the coveted vineyard. The dark deed had been done at night, the king was alert with the morning light. He rode in his chariot from Samaria to Jezreel, which is but seven miles distant, and he rode in something of military state, for in separate chariots, or else riding in the same chariot, behind him were two warlike youths, Jehu and Bidkar, who were destined to remember the events of that day, and to refer to them four years afterwards, when one had become king and the other his chief commander. But the king's joy was shortlived!

For this judicial murder sent a thrill of horror through the land, and the crime had far more to do than the worship of Baal with undermining the throne of Ahab and Jezebel. The popular feeling is doubtless truly reflected in the terrible sentence which (according to the Deuteronomic compiler) Elijah passed upon the actors in this tragedy: "Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will utterly sweep thee away, and will cut off from Ahab every man child . . . and I will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. . . . The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the rampart of Jezreel" (1 Kings xxi. 21–24).

The fulfilment of this curse, long remembered in Israel, was, however, deferred by Ahab's repentance. Stricken apparently with remorseful terror, "he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly (barefoot?)." The Divine mercy was revealed to Elijah—"because Ahab humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house."

4. One feature in the teaching of Elijah still remains; it was perhaps the most immediately important of all. The Divine denunciation of the fall of Ahab's house had its basis, not in the worship of Baal, but in the judicial murder of Naboth (1 Kings xxi.); and Wellhausen has given deserved prominence to the observation of Ewald, that this act of injustice stirred the heart of the nation much more deeply than the religious policy of the house of Omri (2 Kings vi. 32, ix. 25 f.). Naboth's offence was his obstinate adhesion to ancient custom and law, and the crime of Ahab was no common act of violence, but an insult to the moral sense of all Israel. In condemning it Elijah pleaded the cause of Jehovah as the cause of civil order and righteousness; the God as whose messenger he spoke was the God by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. The sovereignty of Jehovah was not an empty thought; it was the refuge of the oppressed, the support of the weak against the mighty. Without this it would have been nothing to declare war against the Tyrian Baal; if Jehovah claimed Israel as His dominion, in which no other god could find a place, He did so because His rule was the rule of absolute righteousness.

¶ The whole history of the world to this day is in truth one continual establishing of the Old Testament revelation: "O ye that love the Eternal, see that ye hate the thing that is evil! to him that ordereth his conversation right, shall be shown the salvation of God." And whether we consider this revelation in respect to human affairs at large, or in respect to individual happiness, in either case its importance is so immense, that the people to whom it was given, and whose record is in the Bible, deserve fully to be singled out as the Bible singles them. "Behold, darkness doth cover the earth, and gross darkness the nations; but the Eternal shall arise upon *thee*, and his glory shall be seen upon thee!" For, while other nations had the misleading idea that this or that, other than righteousness, is saving, and it is not; that this or that, other than conduct, brings happiness, and it does not; Israel had the true idea that *righteousness* is saving, that to *conduct* belongs happiness.[1]

III.

Retribution.

1. Jezebel's end was tardy in its approach. Ahab, her husband, had been shot on the field of battle, and he left only the memory of evil behind him; but she was permitted to live on for some ten years, and saw her two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, seated in succession upon the throne. She was the paramount influence still in the kingdom of Israel and in some measure also in the kingdom of Judah; for there her daughter Athaliah was queen. She was as proud and passionate as ever; as bitterly opposed as in the earlier days to the Jehovah religion, but her cup was well-nigh full and judgment was at the door. A conspiracy was formed against her son, which seemed likely to be successful. It *was* successful. Her son was slain; and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, at the head of an irresistible force, drove furiously to the city of Jezreel to take possession of the throne.

Jehu had been among the young horsemen who had ridden two and two in brilliant procession behind Ahab when Elijah's voice of thunder had announced to him in Jezreel the approach of the Divine doom upon him for the murder of Naboth. On Jehu, that moment had plainly made an impression which nothing

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, chap. xi.

could efface. But with all the dissimulation and subtle cunning of a thorough Israelite, he had so effectively concealed from his royal masters the thoughts that were seething within him that Jehoram still relied entirely upon his loyalty. He was now probably about forty years old; respected among his fellow-officers, accustomed to command and to be obeyed with strictness; but there still glowed in him all the fire of youth. Everyone knew his impetuous riding and driving, in which he stood alone in the whole army; but while he was capable of the most irresistible vehemence and stormy haste, he equally well understood how to follow up his purpose with cold craft and daring cunning; and it was the close union of these opposite means which supplied him with his most terrible weapon.

¶ The first of political virtues in a federal ruler are tact, forbearance, patience. Napoleon's nature was not rich in these qualities. It was remarkable rather for impetuosity. By the year 1806, he had become accustomed to have his way everywhere. Good fortune had spoiled him. As he sorrowfully said at St. Helena—"I just admit that I was spoiled; I always gave orders; from my birth power was mine; I rejected a master or a law." That is not the man who will conciliate diverse peoples.[1]

2. There was one spirit in the house of Ahab still unbroken. The queen-mother Jezebel stood forth a queen to the last, with all her old audacity. The supreme hour of her dynasty and of her life was come. Not even the sudden and dreadful death of her son, or the nearness of her own fate, daunted the steely heart of the Tyrian sorceress. If she was to die, she would meet death like a queen. As though for some Court banquet, she painted her eyelashes and eyebrows with antimony, to make her eyes look large and lustrous, and put on her jewelled head-dress. Then she mounted the palace tower, and, looking down through the lattice above the city gate, watched the thundering advance of Jehu's chariot, and hailed the triumphant usurper with the bitterest insult she could devise. She knew that Omri, her husband's father, had taken swift vengeance on the guilt of the usurper Zimri, who had been forced to burn himself in the harem at Tirzah after one month's troubled reign. Her shrill voice was heard above the roar of the chariot-wheels in the ominous taunt—

[1] J. H. Rose, *The Personality of Napoleon*, 239.

"Is it peace, thou Zimri, thou murderer of thy master?" No! —She meant, "There is no peace for thee or thine, any more than for me or mine! Thou mayest murder us; but thee, too, thy doom awaiteth!" Stung by the ill-omened words, Jehu looked up at her and shouted—"Who is on my side? Who?" One or two eunuchs immediately thrust out of the windows their bloated and beardless faces. "Fling her down!" Jehu shouted. Down they flung the wretched queen (has any queen ever died a death so shamelessly ignominious?), and her blood spirted upon the wall, and on the horses. Jehu, who had stopped only for an instant in his headlong rush, drove his horses over her corpse, and entered the gate of her capital with his wheels crimson with her blood. History records scarcely another instance of such a scene, except when Tullia, a century later, drove her chariot over the dead body of her father Servius Tullius in the *Vicus Sceleratus* of ancient Rome. But what cared Jehu? Many a conqueror ere now has sat down to the dinner prepared for his enemy; and the obsequious household of the dead tyrants, ready to do the bidding of their new lord, ushered the hungry man to the banquet provided for the kings whom he had slain. No man dreamt of uttering a wail; no man thought of raising a finger for dead Jehoram or for dead Jezebel, though they had all been under *her* sway for at least five-and-thirty years. "The wicked perish, and no man regardeth." "When the wicked perish, there is shouting."

3. So died in ignominy and disgrace this wicked queen of Israel; she was even denied common burial; for when Jehu, a little later, thought of it on the ground that she was a king's daughter, the hungry dogs of an Eastern city had already done their work, fulfilling in this way, the writer says, the prophecy of Elijah the Tishbite, Jezebel's great antagonist.

¶ In Phœnicia, where wealth and luxury had been enjoyed on a scale unknown to either Israel or the Canaanites of the interior, there was a refinement, if one may so speak, and at the same time a prodigality of vicious indulgences, connected with the worship of Baal and Astarte, to which Israel had hitherto been a stranger, and whose promotion under the new auspices has made the name of Jezebel a Biblical synonym for all that is to the last degree impure, cruel, and shameless. As far as the effect of these things

upon the physical and political life of the state was concerned there was a vast difference between the experience of an enterprising, energetic community like that of the Phœnician cities, with their world-wide plans and interests, and that of Israel, contracted and simple in its habits and aims. Injurious it was, no doubt, to both, but to the one it was a surface sore on the body politic, while to the other it was like a cancer eating into the vitals, or a head and heart sickness resulting in total decay (Isa. i. 6). To Israel moral deterioration meant political as well as spiritual death. The weal of the nation lay in fidelity to Jehovah alone, and in His pure worship.[1]

¶ In Rev. ii. 20 we read: "But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Who was Jezebel? Can we get any light thrown on it from other sources? The analogy of Balaam and Balak shows that the name is used figuratively. It was some woman who called herself a prophetess, who, like the wife of Ahab, was an active promoter of false religions. Now Dr. Schürer has drawn attention to an inscription from Thyatira, which seems to imply the existence in the place of a shrine of the Eastern sibyl. Such a shrine would be a centre of divination, of the sort of magic which was always most hostile to Christianity, of the sanctified immorality which was an habitual concomitant of Oriental types of religion and of the often licentious sacrificial banquets. The presence of such a shrine, as much a home of alien and novel worship as was a Christian Church, with a vigorous and interested propaganda, would be a great danger to Christianity.[2]

[1] J. F. McCurdy, *History, Prophecy and the Monuments*, i. 258.

[2] A. C. Headlam, in *Authority and Archæology, Sacred and Profane*, 360.

ELIJAH.

I.

A Prophet's Preparation.

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A Prophet's Preparation.

Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months.—James v. 17.

It is impossible to have any doubt of the extraordinary nature of the prophetic career of Elijah. It is exhibited forcibly enough in the whole course of the history; for it was he and he alone, with no other instrument than the simple power of his spirit and his speech, who achieved no less a marvel than a complete revolution of the existing condition of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes.[1]

1. There had always been, in Israel, an idolatrous, disbelieving party. The nation's history, throughout its whole length, shows a polluted stream of idolatrous worship running side by side with the true worship of Jehovah; and sometimes this idolatrous current became so broad that it gave its own colour to the whole stream of the people's religious life. They were idolaters in Ur of the Chaldees—"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham; and they served other gods." They were idolaters in Egypt. In the wilderness their idolatry broke out when they joined themselves unto Baal-Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. They were idolaters in Canaan. Even David's wife, the daughter of Saul, possessed idols, with one of which she deceived the hired assassins of her father, and saved her husband's life. The idolatrous elements were numerous and pervaded every class in the nation, and they only awaited some hand skilful and strong enough to combine them, in order to acquire the command of the people's thoughts and assume the place of the national faith.

2. The apostasy of Jeroboam, who set up the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, produced its necessary results. The people were

[1] H. Ewald, *The History of Israel*, iv. 63.

gradually alienated from the worship of Jehovah, and found the voluptuous ceremonies associated with heathen cults more congenial to their taste. When Ahab ascended the throne, this degrading process reached its culmination; with little difficulty he introduced a number of abominable practices hitherto unknown. Personally, he was not unfavourable to the old religion, whose grand traditions appealed to his racial pride; he would fain have allowed it to remain side by side with the foreign intruders. But he was a weak prince, and easily dominated by a stronger will. His marriage to the Syrian princess, Jezebel, put him in the clutches of a woman whose wayward fanaticism knew no bounds. She was herself the daughter of a priest of Ashtoreth, and she made it her chief purpose in life to establish the worship of the Phœnician deities, Baal and Ashtoreth, in Israel, to the exclusion of all others, that of Jehovah included. A magnificent temple was built to Baal in Samaria, and another to Ashtoreth at Jezreel; and to each was attached a formidable array of priests. For the first time in history, religious persecution was resorted to; the prophets of Jehovah were mercilessly put to the sword; and it seemed as if nothing could arrest the wave of moral ruin which swept over the land.

3. But the religious crisis produced its hero. It was necessary that some one individual, endowed with supreme energy, should first sustain the contest on behalf of all; and Elijah accordingly effected, for the first time and in the most forcible manner, what his example gradually taught the whole nation to achieve upon the path originally laid down by him. It is this that constitutes the true and lofty significance of Elijah's career. He attains the sublime altitude of Samuel, not, like his great predecessor, in contest with the human monarchy, which had yet to be placed on a firmer basis, but in a struggle of a very different character against heathenism, whose only protection lay in a monarchy already degenerate; he even manifests the heroic greatness of Moses, not, however, as founder of a new institution, in which capacity he cannot be compared even with Samuel, but only as the champion of an old organization. Rugged, stern, solitary, he has no commission to reveal new truth. He is not a "prophet" like later ones whose words were revelation. He is not so

much a prophetic teacher as the precursor of prophetic teachers. As his likeness in the Christian era came to prepare the way for One greater than himself, so Elijah came to prepare the way for the close succession of prophets who, for the next hundred years, sustained both Israel and Judah by hopes and promises before unknown. As of Luther, so of Elijah it may be said that he was a reformer and not a theologian. He wrote, he predicted, he taught, almost nothing. He is to be valued not for what he said, but for what he did; not because he created, but because he destroyed. His task was to reform and restore, not to advance; and his endowments of "spirit and power" correspond to his work.

¶ The place of the prophet is in a religious crisis where the ordinary interpretation of acknowledged principles breaks down, where it is necessary to go back not to received doctrine but to Jehovah Himself. The word of Jehovah through the prophet is properly a declaration of what Jehovah as the personal King of Israel commands in this particular crisis, and it is spoken with authority, not as an inference from previous revelation, but as the direct expression of the character and will of a personal God, who has made Himself personally audible in the prophet's soul. General propositions about Divine things are not the basis but the outcome of such personal knowledge of Jehovah, just as in ordinary human life a general view of a man's character must be formed by observation of his attitude and action in a variety of special circumstances. Elijah's whole career, and not his words merely, contained a revelation of Jehovah to Israel—that is, made them feel that through this man Jehovah asserted Himself as a living God in their midst.[1]

I.

The Prophet and the King.

1. The startling suddenness of Elijah's leap into the arena, where he appears without preface or explanation, helps the impression of extraordinary force which his whole career makes. He crashes like a thunderbolt into the midst of Ahab's court. He comes before us as the Christ of St. Mark comes before us—full-grown, developed, equipped for his mission. He stands forth all at once

[1] W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, 82.

in the political arena. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we are confronted by a spectral form denouncing idolatry, predicting vengeance. Nothing is told us of his descent; it is even questionable whether the reading which calls him "the Tishbite" is correct. We know only that he was of Gilead, and therefore used to a ruder, freer, simpler life than in the kings' palaces. He is plain in his garb, rough, an hairy man, wearing the skin of some animal, but bearing also the mantle which is the badge of the prophetic office. He is a man of few wants, and asks little of the earth. He needs nothing that Ahab can bestow, and he is independent of all human help. He has been much in solitude, and in the awful silence of the desert he has thought and prayed much. His independence of mien, his fearlessness of king or courtier, his lofty sense of a Divine vocation and a Divine message, will not suffer him to confer with flesh and blood. There is an appearance of austerity about him; and, when you look more narrowly at him, you see that he is simply dead to the world, and that the form of deadness to the world which he has taken on is simply that which his high vocation, in such times, necessitates. He is stern in manner, stern as the unbending truth; he is intolerant in spirit, but it is the holy intolerance which cannot brook the effrontery which has substituted the cruel and abominable rites of the most degraded forms of paganism for the pure worship of the Lord God of Israel. He has so strong and vivid a sense of the claims of conscience, of righteousness, and of the Lord God of Israel, that he is filled with a holy impatience and indignation at the thought of other claims which dare presume to compete with these.

Moses was all impatient to deliver the people in his own way. He had to learn that to do God's work he must follow the Divine method. In the solitude of the wilderness he found time for reflection, meditation and prayer. And he returned to deliver God's people in God's way. There was also need of such a discipline in the soul of that fierce prophet Elijah. He had to lose much of his austerity and despondency, and to grow more sociable and self-controlled, before he could be a fit instrument for the purposes of the Almighty. He was, indeed, very jealous for the Lord of Hosts, but he stood in danger of sinking, like the Baptist of after ages, into the darkness of gloom and despair. For his nature was

not evenly balanced. There was a lack of harmony and proportion between will and spirit, mind and soul. He had to learn and to suffer many things—

> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music as before,
> But vaster.

2. Elijah has come out from the presence of God where he has long prayed—prayed, and prevailed in prayer. He has prayed that God would interfere in those troublous times, and maintain the witness of His own being and glory. He has prayed for judicial drought, for the closing of the heavens for three years and six months; he has prayed and prevailed; and he is sent to the court of Samaria as the messenger of Him who controls all nature's forces,—the witness to the fact, by pre-intimation, that the coming scourge of drought was from the hand of Jehovah, that he might one day be witness to the fact that the returning blessing of rain was from that God who had given Israel drink in the wilderness. He has come out from the presence of God, and yet he has the consciousness of standing in it—the power with whom he has wrestled in prayer being in him and round about him. And so, appearing suddenly, and having the consciousness not only that he is the messenger of God, but that God the Lord is with him, he hurls his terrific message into that apostate and idolatrous court, fearless of consequences, though he stands alone.

¶ In later literature and thought, Elijah stands as the classic example of a brave, effective herald of reform. In times of moral and religious degeneracy, later Judaism looked for his return or for the appearance of one who in his spirit would denounce all forms of apostasy and injustice, even though these were intrenched under the shadow of a throne or of a sanctuary. Elijah's conception of Jehovah, however, appears to have been the same as that of Moses and the earlier leaders of his race. They were quite willing that Baal should be worshipped in Phœnicia; but in Jehovah's land there was no place for a heathen god. His recognition of the Arameans as agents in accomplishing Jehovah's purpose also suggests that broadening conception of the sphere of Jehovah's influence which became an accepted fact in the thought of Amos and Hosea. Elijah's great work, however, appears to have been done not as a theologian but as a reformer, who stayed

the encroachments of Baalism and championed the rights of the people against the fatal tyranny of their king. He was therefore the forerunner of the great social reformers of succeeding generations, who defined religion not merely in terms of belief and ritual but also in terms of justice and mercy. While he himself did not see the popular acceptance of the principles which he proclaimed, Elijah was the great informing spirit of his age, inspiring the activity of his disciple Elisha and preparing the way for the epoch-making prophets of the Assyrian period.[1]

¶ Had Elijah been merely a patriot, to whom the State stood above every other consideration, he would have condoned the faults of a king who did so much for the greatness of his nation; but the things for which Elijah contended were of far more worth than the national existence of Israel, and it is a higher wisdom than that of patriotism which insists that Divine truth and civil righteousness are more than all the counsels of statecraft. Judged from a mere political point of view, Elijah's work had no other result than to open a way for the bloody and unscrupulous ambition of Jehu and lay bare the frontiers of the land to the ravages of the ferocious Hazael; but with him the religion of Jehovah had already reached a point where it could no longer be judged by a merely national standard, and the truths of which he was the champion were not the less true because the issue made it plain that the cause of Jehovah could not triumph without destroying the old Hebrew state. Nay, without the destruction of the State the religion of Israel could never have given birth to a religion for all mankind, and it was precisely the incapacity of Israel to carry out the higher truths of religion in national forms which brought into clearer and clearer prominence those things in the faith of Jehovah which are independent of every national condition and make Jehovah the God not of Israel alone but of all the earth. The work of Elijah was not so much that of a great teacher as of a great hero. He did not preach any new doctrine about Jehovah, but at a critical moment he saw what loyalty to the cause of Jehovah demanded, and of that cause he became the champion, not by mere words, but by his life.[2]

[1] C. F. Kent, *Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah*, 29.

[2] W. Robertson Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, 78.

II.

The Prophet in Solitude.

1. The drought with which Elijah threatened Ahab and his court was the recognized Divine punishment of apostasy (Deut. xi. 16, 17). It was a penalty which many in Israel, if not Ahab himself, would understand. If any doubt could linger in the mind of Ahab as to the meaning of this warning, the announcement of Elijah that he came in the name of "Jehovah, the God of Israel," proclaimed at once that God demanded the recognition of His true place in the life of the nation, and would by no means give His glory to another. The immediate effect of that appearance and message has not been made known to us. But after Elijah delivered his message, he vanished into solitude. He was guided by the Spirit of Jehovah to the brook Cherith, "that is before (*i.e.* to the east of) Jordan," probably in his native Gilead.

He had denounced the evil course of the nation; he had foretold disaster, and now the distressed people, reaping what they had sown, were in a mood to wreak their bitter resentment on him who had faithfully pointed out the evil of their ways and painted its certain consequences. But, secure in the lurking places along the brook, he could bide his time, and wait the occasion for the further service he might render to his misguided nation.

Cherith was part of the training for Carmel. The flight thither was as much an act of obedient faith as was the appearance before the king. However the necessity of flight was impressed on the prophet, it *was* impressed on him as manifestly not his own plan, but God's command; and though the journey was a weary one, and the appointed place of refuge inhospitable, the command was unhesitatingly obeyed.

Inaccessibility, security of hiding, romance of situation—these are the characteristics of the place on which the best Eastern travellers have pitched as most likely the Brook Cherith. A delightful retreat surely for one who loved meditation and prayer, and who, amid the soothing and ennobling influences of nature, could hold high converse with his God and with his own soul. Not better adapted was such a place to baffle the persecutor's

murderous search than to foster meditation and the spirit of devotion. It was such a place as the thoughtful anchorite, leaving the world behind him, might have chosen; such a place as would have nursed the deep poetic soul of some whose solitary musings have enriched our literature. And there comes to us from that secure hiding this message—Do thy duty fearlessly, manfully. Deliver thy message, the message of truth which God has given thee, regardless of all that men say or think. And, if storms of rage and tempests of wrath should break out upon thee because thou hast dared to speak as God directed thee, He will shelter thee in the midst of the storm, and safely keep thee in the midst of the tempest. Thou shalt be securely hidden. The arrows of the trooper shall not reach thee in thy hiding-place. The scent of the bloodhound shall not track thee out. The hairs of your head are all numbered.

¶ God has the whole campaign for a world carefully planned out. And each man's part in it is planned too. He knows best what needs to be done. He sees keenly the strategic points, and the emergencies. If only He could but depend on our ears being trained to know His voice, and our wills trained to simple, full obedience, how much difference it would make to Him. Simple, full, strong obedience seems to take the keenest intelligence, the strongest will, and the most thorough discipline.

Just to ask Him what to do,
All the day.
And to make you quick and true
To obey.

This surrender is for glad, obedient service. And note too that it is for *training* in service.[1]

¶ In times of quietness the heart unfolds itself before God. If thou wouldst grow in grace, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door upon the world,—upon that world which gets the closest to thee, and haunts thee so familiarly. Shut it, most of all, upon thy busy, unresting self; and then God shall speak to thee. It may be He will commune with thee as He has never done before, and reveal unto thee the secret of His presence. . . . And this truly is to know Him; not as an abstraction, but as One who careth for us, who is nigh to us, to whom we may draw nigh; and as such, to pour out our hearts before Him; to be silent in

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Service*, 82.

His presence; to be drawn out of self; out of earthliness, and the noise, and the dimness of self-worship, and to "hold ourselves still in Him."[1]

2. It meant a great deal to Elijah to be severed for a while from the work he was burning to perform; to quit the battle-field at the very beginning of the fight; to be doomed to a state which, to a fiery temperament like his, was the most insupportable of all —a state of inactivity. But Elijah had some lessons to learn. The fact that the judgment sent upon the people came on the suggestion of Elijah, and in answer to his prayer, seems to be a very significant one. It appears, indeed, to supply the key to the prophet's early ministry. We picture to ourselves a man full of indignation as he thought of the apostasy of the land, and full of a fiery zeal for the honour of the God who was being forsaken. In this state of mind he cannot wait for the development of the Divine plan of reformation, but burns for an opportunity to try methods of his own. He prays that it may not rain. Looking at the matter from the side of Elijah himself, we may say that he takes it upon him to indicate what ought to be done in the circumstances. So eager is he that he is not content to obey. He leads, he guides, he points out what requires to be done; and the remarkable thing is, that God allows him to follow out his own course, doing what is asked of Him, and suffering him to discover his errors only through his own failures.

¶ Elijah has been born with too much independence in his heart. His native instinct is towards self-reliance. What he deems easy he thinks everybody should deem easy. The lesson he needs from life is an experience of individual feebleness. He is not humanitarian enough, because he is not near enough to the ground. He does not make allowance for human frailty, because he is too confident of *himself*. He must be taught self-distrust, that he may learn the needs of man.[2]

¶ Distrust of self and confidence in God are the two mystic wings of the dove; that is to say, of the soul which, having learnt to be simple, takes its flight and rests in God, the great and sovereign object of its love, of its flight, and of its repose. *The Spiritual Combat*, which is an excellent epitome of the science of salvation and of heavenly teaching, makes these two things,

[1] Bishop S. Wilberforce.

[2] G. Matheson, *The Representative Men of the Bible*, i. 316.

distrust of self and confidence in God, to be, as it were, the introduction to true wisdom: they are, the author tells us, the two feet on which we walk towards it, the two arms with which we embrace it, and the two eyes with which we perceive it. In proportion to the growth of one of these two in us is the increase of the other; the greater or the less the degree of our self-distrust, the greater or the less the degree of our confidence in God.[1]

3. The silence of the ravine, the long days and nights of solitude, the punctual arrival of his food, would all tend to weld his faith into yet more close-knit strength; and we cannot doubt that, spending the time of his solitude in intimate communion with God, he learnt more of God's will and of God's nature there than he could have done had he remained in the tents of ungodliness.

¶ God calls and guides the soul to inward Solitude and mystical Silence, when He says that He will speak to her alone, in the most secret and hidden part of the heart. Thou must enter into this mystical Silence, if thou wouldst hear the sweet and Divine Voice. It is not enough, in order to gain this Treasure, to forsake the World, nor to renounce thine own Desires, and all things created, if thou wean not thyself also from all Desires and Thoughts. Rest in this mystical Silence and open the Door, that so God may communicate Himself unto thee, unite Himself with thee, and transform thee into Himself.[2]

¶ Just after I settled in my New Zealand manse, it was my great privilege to entertain one of the most gifted, most experienced, and most gracious of our ministers. I felt it to be a priceless opportunity, and I sought his counsel concerning all my early ministerial difficulties. One lovely morning we were sitting together on the verandah, looking away across the golden plains to the purple and sunlit mountains, when I broached to him this very question. "Can a man be quite sure," I asked, "that, in the hour of perplexity, he will be rightly led? Can he feel secure against a false step?" I shall never forget his reply. He sprang from his deck chair and came earnestly towards me. "I am certain of it," he exclaimed, "if he will but give God time! Remember that as long as you live," he added entreatingly—"Give God time!" Give God time, and when the bed of the brook is dry, Elijah shall hear the guiding voice![3]

[1] J. P. Camus, *The Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, 37.
[2] Michael de Molinos, *The Spiritual Guide*.
[3] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 51.

Farewell, my Loneliness!
I that had thought to curse thee, come to bless.
Deep skies and glowing stars in thee I found.
A stream ran through the sandy wilderness
And roses blossomed on the desert ground.

Beloved Solitude!
No voices over-eager, harsh or rude,
Mar the sweet music of thy gracious hours.
Among the crowd of those too near and dear
Too often have I known disgust and fear,
The isolation of those glorious powers
That in self-knowledge are, not, not ourselves, but ours.[1]

III.

The Prophet and the Widow.

1. As time went on, the brook Cherith dwindled day by day under the scorching sun, and at last it became nothing but a dry channel full of stifling heat. Then came the word of the Lord to Elijah, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee." God's new dealing with the prophet was as mysterious as the former one. Before, the unclean birds, the ravens, had been his sustainers. Now a poor widow, an idolatress, a subject of the wicked Jezebel's father, is to be his protector.

In the heat of Elijah's conflict, how strange, how significant that "truce of God," when Jehovah's champion, in the hour of defeat, is directed to accept the hospitality of one whom his experience taught him to regard as a born enemy of God! No doubt Elijah needed the softening of such an association lest the wine of earnestness should ferment into the vinegar of bigotry. In that strangely peaceful interlude of Elijah's stormy career, when the stern monotheist lived upon the charity of the poor idolatress, we see Providence teaching him, and teaching us, that humanity is a true service of God; that the ignorant devotees of a false religion are by no means God's enemies; that the deeds of benevolence are a worship which God accepts of those from whom His name is hidden; that the servant of God must not disown

[1] M. E. Coleridge.

the obligations of charity to those whose sin he must sternly reprove. Elijah learnt to sympathize with one of another race and a strange religion, and his stern nature was in some degree softened by contact with human suffering. He rewarded the widow's charity first by miraculously increasing her small store of meal and oil, and later by restoring her child to life. His experience began to prepare him for a higher revelation, which he was in due time to receive.

¶ The prophets and saints of God do not always understand the meaning of Providence or the lessons of their Divine training. Francis of Assisi at first entirely misunderstood the real drift and meaning of the Divine intimations that he was to rebuild the ruined Church of God, which he afterwards so gloriously fulfilled. The thoughts of God are not as man's thoughts, nor His ways as man's ways. The education of Elijah was far from complete even long afterwards. To the very last, if we are to accept the records of him as historically literal, amid the revelations vouchsafed to him he had not grasped the truth that the Elijah-spirit, however needful it may seem to be, differs very widely from the Spirit of the Lord of Life. Yet may it not have been that Elijah was sent to learn from the kind ministrations of a Sidonian widow, to whose care his life was due, some inkling of those truths which Christ revealed so many centuries afterwards, when He visited the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, and extended His mercy to the great faith of the Syro-Phœnician woman? May not Elijah have been meant to learn what had to be taught by experience to the two great Apostles of the Circumcision and the Uncircumcision, that not every Baal-worshipper was necessarily corrupt or wholly insincere? St. Peter was thus taught that God is no respecter of persons, and that whether their religious belief be false or true, in every nation he that feareth Him and doeth righteousness is accepted of Him. St. Paul learnt at Damascus and taught at Athens that God made of one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, that they should seek God if haply they might feel after Him and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us.[1]

2. Elijah might well have thought that God had sent him to a strange helper in this poor widow with her empty cupboard; and it must have taken some faith on his part to reassure her with his cheery "Fear not!" The prediction of the undiminish-

[1] F. W. Farrar.

ing stores demanded as much faith from its speaker as from its hearer, and the raising of the widow's dead son even more. The woman had a firmer faith in Elijah than ever after she received her son alive at his hands; but Elijah himself had more confidence than ever in his God. It was by such experiences as these that Jehovah was training His servant up to that sublimity of faith and courage which he evinced on Mount Carmel, when he confronted Ahab and the priests and prophets of Baal. It was easy for him to ask fire to come down and consume his sacrifice, after he had seen God restore a dead child to life in response to his entreaty.

¶ People commonly assume that religious faith consists in holding an intricate and complicated system of beliefs. The real process is both simpler and more difficult. Faith has first to shine within us, giving light to all the blind gropings, the immature instincts, the faltering affirmations, which are the chaotic fragments of a spiritual nature; all the hopes, questionings, presentiments, doubts, aspirations, which, at the shining of that light, are to come to a knowledge of themselves, and find their own meaning and value as a living experience of God. In the light and fire of this experience, faith itself will be purified and chastened, and will emerge from it as a knowledge of God.[1]

¶ I have lately been reading R. H. Hutton's *Modern Guides of English Thought in Matters of Faith.* Carlyle, Newman, and Maurice are to my mind the men best worth studying—and for this reason: they are all in earnest. All these three men subordinated everything to the thought of the supreme direction of God. No doubt their conceptions of God were very different. It was perhaps impossible for anyone so totally devoid of humility as Carlyle to be a Christian. God was in his eyes the Schoolmaster of the Universe whose first care was for discipline. Carlyle himself was "the good boy" of the school who was never weary of preaching to his comrades that they would "catch it." But he was "terribly in earnest." He believed in law and order, and never lost sight of discipline. Maurice had taken to heart, perhaps more than any other man of this century, "God is love"; and, as in all these men truth is "touched by emotion," he devoted his life to proclaiming the conviction. Newman has felt that there were only two existences that concerned him, God and himself; and his life has been a long and strenuous preparation for eternity. All these have been influenced throughout life by

[1] A. Chandler, *Faith and Experience.*

their *faith*, and belief is the true cure for all the lowering influences which act upon us. It seems to me that Christians who squabble about forms of Christianity are like people in the following fable. In an eastern city the plague was raging. A great doctor came from a foreign country and gave the doctors of the city an elixir which was a specific for the plague. The doctors approved it and announced that they were going to administer it, but unfortunately, instead of setting to work to dispense it, they took to quarrelling and wrangling about the shape of the glass in which the elixir should be given, and every one to hear them would have thought that the virtue lay not in the elixir, but the glass.[1]

[1] *Life and Remains of the Rev. R. H. Quick*, 111.

ELIJAH.

II.

Triumph and Despair.

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Triumph and Despair.

O Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant.—1 Kings xviii. 36.

It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.—1 Kings xix. 4.

I.

Carmel.

1. The next section of Elijah's career is one full of vicissitudes, abounding in startling contrasts, and containing exciting incidents. Three years and six months had elapsed since Elijah had said to Ahab, "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." During that time Elijah had disappeared from all men's ken, and every effort to trace him had been wholly unsuccessful. But the time was now approaching when God's punishment of the land was to cease; and therefore the word of the Lord came to Elijah, "Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." Elijah chose to send a summons to the king by the hand of Obadiah, Ahab's trusted minister, who was secretly an adherent of Jehovah and had done what he could to protect the prophets of the Lord. No doubt Elijah had an object in doing this; and that object was to compel Obadiah to make a bolder stand for God, to declare himself more openly on the side of truth and right.

2. The meeting of the prophet and the king is very dramatic. Ahab has never been able to stifle the conscience of an Israelite, and cannot withhold his respect from the prophet of Jehovah. He bitterly accuses Elijah of being the troubler of Israel; but when the prophet flings back the charge, the king is silenced

(ver. 17 ff.). Elijah challenges, or rather commands, him to summon the prophets of Baal to a contest between Jehovah and Baal on Mount Carmel. The worshippers of Baal will sacrifice to their God; Elijah himself will sacrifice to Jehovah; the god who answers by fire, he shall be God.

No living eye till then had witnessed an assemblage so grand in a need so dire as that which the despair and hope of king and people now gathered at Elijah's word upon the heights of Carmel. It is precisely the fit stage for such a drama. From its summit, as they looked westward and northward, they see the Mediterranean dotted with the merchant ships of Tyre and Sidon, outward or inward bound, with the riches of the world; and Tyre and Sidon in all their glory—the grand strongholds of Baal. As the people looked eastward and southward, yonder may be descried, far off, the Sea of Galilee gleaming in the morning sun; and as the eye sweeps round to the southward, the plain of Jezreel, and Mount Tabor shooting up out of it; and, southward still, Ramoth-gilead and Ebal and Gerizim and Shechem and Shiloh, and a hundred mountain-tops and villages, around which hang a thousand hallowed associations and memories of the marvellous power and loving-kindness of Jehovah to their fathers. Thus they stand as with two immense maps unrolled at their feet: on the one side the map of the kingdom of Baal, on the other side that of the kingdom of Jehovah. In the centre of the multitude the court prophets of Baal are gathered to confront the rude son of the desert, the solitary prophet of Jehovah. Then for the first time both king and people heard proclaimed the vital principle of true religion—no compromise of truth. The stern prophet brings them squarely to the issue, with a single sentence, whose tones thrill them as though Carmel shook under their feet, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if Jehovah be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." And, we are told, "the people answered him not a word." The single sentence is a shot point-blank to the heart. Carried to its mark by the Spirit of God, the shaft quivers in ten thousand consciences; Baal is already defeated. All that follows of the proposed test and the altar, and the fire from heaven, are but the successive steps of the victor pursuing his vanquished and demoralized foe.

¶ God, to the Hindu, represents gods and demons innumerable who are always at strife with him, and have continually and in every imaginable way to be propitiated and appeased. Small-pox is only the goddess Sitala Devi. Her headquarters are at Mantreshwa Kund, Ajudhiya, where prayers and offerings are made to her every Monday for deliverance from the scourge over which she presides. Yet, notwithstanding all the vigorous "puja" done to her, she is adding to the calamity of the plague by sending us small-pox. We also have a place for a rather frivolous goddess called Chhutki Devi, where, on the fourteenth day of any month, after paying her court and duly satisfying her demands, you spin round on your heels, snap your fingers, and attain all your desires. But neither this Devi nor, indeed, any other of the gods, is doing much for the Hindus just now. When the plague first broke out the temples and shrines did a roaring trade. Offerings poured in and the ceaseless cry, as of old, went up, "O Baal! hear us." The plague first broke out in Ajudhiya; in a very short time its normal population of 20,000 went down to 5,000, and now I am told that there are hardly 4,000 left. When plague was at its height I visited Ajudhiya and went to all the big temples. I am well known in them. I, only a Methodist missionary, was earnestly entreated by the priests, in each temple I visited, to intercede on their behalf with the Government, firstly, to put an end to this plague and, secondly, to forbid the people running away and deserting their temples. "It's very rough on you," I said, "very rough. Here are these fellows all bolting; how do they expect the temples to be maintained and the poor priests to be fed?" "Ah!" said the priests, "the fear of the plague has driven all this out of them." "But what about yourselves," I said, "and what about your gods? What about that lesser goddess, Chhutki Devi (to say nothing of big and powerful ones, like Ram, Hanuman, Ganesh and Mahadeo)? Why don't you make your offerings, spin merrily round on your heels, snap your fingers, and attain all your desires? You tell the worshippers that is all they have to do. Why don't you do it?" "Ah!" said they, "we don't know what to make of the gods; they neither hear nor do anything." I got one of my best chances that day for preaching from the first and second commandments, and was quietly and reverently listened to.[1]

¶ Now, therefore, if there be any God, and if there be any virtue, and if there be any truth, choose ye this day, rulers of men, whom you will serve. Your hypocrisy is not in pretending to be what you are not; but in being in the uttermost nature of you—

[1] *Padri Elliott of Faizabad*, 258.

Nothing—but dead bodies in coffins suspended between Heaven and Earth, God and Mammon. If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him. You would fain be respectful to Baal, keep smooth with Belial, dine with Moloch, sup, with golden spoon of sufficient length, with Beelzebub;—and kiss the Master to bid Him good-night.[1]

3. Elijah was now satisfied that the end had been gained. Baal-worship was overthrown. The national faith was restored. It would have been well had he rested with that victory. But the militant instinct was not dead within him. The meeting closed in bloodshed. In his fiery exultation, Elijah called for the destruction of the corrupters of Israel's faith; and the terror-struck and discomfited prophets of Baal and of the Asherah were hurried by the multitude down the mountain-side, and massacred at the brook Kishon.

That swift and terrible slaughter of the priests of Baal may be regarded as a solemn act of judgment. These men were not only priests of a false and degrading religion, but sinners against the State. Israel was still in principle a theocracy, and the deeds of those priests would be judged as acts of rebellion against the sovereign power, a crime for which the death penalty is written in the law of every nation in Christian Europe. Yet it was the fruit of one-sided passion, exaggerated self-assertiveness, and unconscious pride; and it brought a dark night to close a bright day.

¶ To this day the names about Carmel shudder, as it were, with reminiscence of this religious massacre. There is *El-Muhrakkah*, "the place of burning"; there is *Tel-el-Kusis*, "the hill of the priests"; and that ancient river, the river Kishon, which had once been choked with the corpses of the host of Sisera and has since then been incarnadined by the slain of many a battle, is—perhaps in memory of this bloodshed most of all—still known as the *Nahr-el-Mokatta*, or "the stream of slaughter." What wonder that the Eastern Christians in their pictures of Elijah still surround him with the decapitated heads of these his enemies? To this day the Moslim regard him as one who terrifies and slays. But though the deed of vengeance stands recorded, and recorded with no censure, in the sacred history, we must—without condemning Elijah, and without measuring his days by the meting-rod of Christian mercy—still unhesitatingly

[1] Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera*, letter 84 (*Works*, xxix. 293).

hold fast the sound principle of early and as yet uncontaminated Christianity, and say, as said the early Fathers, *Βία ἐχθρὸν Θεῷ*. Violence is a thing hateful to the God of love.[1]

4. As the drought had begun at the word of Elijah, its ending too must come as the answer to his fervent prayer. On the top of Carmel he threw himself on the ground, with his face between his knees, in the attitude of a solitary wrestler with God. Seven times he sent his servant to look towards the Mediterranean for the sign of an answer. At last it came. "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." At once the message was sent to the king, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." But before the king could do so, "the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain." Through the deluge Ahab's chariot hurried to Jezreel, and Elijah, with supernatural strength, "girded up his loins" and ran before the chariot to the very entrance to the city.

¶ "And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, as the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Your modern philosophers have explained to you the absurdity of all that, you think? Of all the shallow follies of this age, that proclamation of the vanity of prayer for the sunshine and rain, and the cowardly equivocations, to meet it, of clergy who never in their lives really prayed for anything, I think, excel. Do these modern scientific gentlemen fancy that nobody, before they were born, knew the laws of cloud and storm, or that the mighty human souls of former ages, who every one of them lived and died by prayer, and in it, did not know that in every petition framed on their lips they were asking for what was not only fore-ordained, but just as probably fore done? or that the mother pausing to pray before she opens the letter from Alma or Balaclava, does not know that already he is saved for whom she prays, or already lies festering in his shroud? The whole confidence and glory of prayer is in its appeal to a Father who knows our necessities before we ask, who knows our thoughts before they rise in our hearts, and whose decrees, as unalterable in the eternal future as in the eternal past, yet in the close verity of visible fact, bend, like reeds, before the fore-ordained and faithful prayers of His children.[2]

[1] F. W. Farrar.

[2] Ruskin, *Notes for Readings in "Modern Painters"* (*Works*, xxii. 532).

5. Elijah imagined that the battle for truth had been fought and won, and that his task was virtually accomplished. But his triumph was brief. Before the day closed, an extraordinary and unexpected spectacle came to be witnessed. A message was received from the queen—the ablest and most determined enemy of the Hebrew religion—intimating that she was neither converted nor discouraged, and that she was preparing to take her revenge on the agent in the nominal reformation; and the night saw the valiant defender of the faith in ignominious flight.

Elijah's presence had never been so necessary as now. The work of destruction had commenced; and the people were in a mood to carry it through to the bitter end. The tide had turned, and was setting in towards God; and he was needed to direct its flow, to keep the people true to the choice which they had made, and to complete the work of reformation by a work of construction. From what we have seen of him, we should have expected that he would receive the message with unruffled composure; laying it before God in quiet confidence, assured that He would hide him, in the secret of His pavilion, from the wrath of man, and shield him from the strife of tongues. But we are told: "When he saw that, he arose, and went for his life." The threat grasped his heart at the moment when his departing violence left him exhausted. Fear and deep depression seized him. He fled for his life into the wilderness. But as he wandered southward, and the first stun of the blow had lost its sharpness of acute pain and become a dull sense of injury received, he made for solitude that he might seek the ear of his God. A sense of the dreariness of a wasted life overspread his soul. He cast himself down, in the breathless solitude of the desert, under the poor shelter of a juniper bush, and poured out his soul to God. Alone and weary, he prayed for death: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers."

¶ A modern martyr dies appealing to posterity, invoking the judgment of the future. When prejudice and passion shall be no more, and truth shall have freer scope, then his cause, misjudged now, shall be held just; and his name, that goes down dishonoured now, shall shine with a perpetual lustre. So it has often been found to be; succeeding generations look back with wonder upon the mistakes and blindness of former times. And

so it has come to be a settled belief that all who have done great deeds, shall yet, even here, receive the just award of praise or blame; and men who are conscious to themselves of insight or power can, when misjudged, make their appeal without fear to the better informed judgment of the time to come. But perhaps, in Elijah's days, this general truth had hardly been gained. At least, there is no sign that the thought at all sustained him; rather, all seemed to him lost, and he longed to die. In such moments men do not think. Neither can they look beyond the present. Neither is there any consistency in their feelings. God remained to Elijah; and yet God's cause seemed irretrievably lost. The truth is, his mind was quite disorganized. Like a warrior who has waged all day an unequal strife, and at the last received a mortal stroke, he retires from the field to die alone; and when the languor is falling on him, he says, "Now, O Lord, take away my life."[1]

¶ Sudden misgivings and agonizing doubts flashed upon John Stuart Mill. His implicit and complacent trust in his philosophical evangel was rudely shattered, and his mission to upraise a world of which he was woefully ignorant was abandoned in despair. For an interval everything on which he had depended tottered and seemed about to fall. He deeply realized that, if all his objects in life could be attained at that moment, the result would give him no lasting satisfaction. He says with melancholy emphasis, "At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm; and how could there ever again be an interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for."[2]

6. Some part of Elijah's despondency might be due to physical weakness; but it was almost altogether spiritual. The tide of spiritual power had never risen so high, even in his soul, as it had done on Carmel. Never before had he felt so confident, and wielded, with such absolute mastery, his sway over men's minds. Never before, perhaps, had such thoughts risen in his mind as rose then, of a kingdom conquered for Jehovah, and a nation born in an hour, and a realm cleansed from all impurities, and every knee bowed to the Lord. Victory for Jehovah was secure; and he was the conqueror. But now spiritual reaction

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 175.

[2] S. P. Cadman, *Charles Darwin and other English Thinkers*, 102.

has set in in his own soul; and he is a fugitive, crouching under a bush in the wilderness. The facile crowd has returned to its impure rites again, not one voice daring to raise itself on the Lord's side—the kingdom which seemed the Lord's not merely thrown back, but hopelessly Baal's; and all his efforts lost. And so his mind falls suddenly from the pinnacle of triumph and jubilation to the low dismal swamp of dejection and fear.

¶ The prophet's despair was the natural effect of a great exercise of destructive power upon the mind of him to whom it has been entrusted. The sense of exhaustion, the cry, "I am not better than my fathers," though I have done such wonders, the hopelessness of the future becoming all the more deep from the apparently useless triumph that had been won already—surely every prophet must have these bitter experiences if he is not to sink into a Baal-worshipper, and after all to regard the God of Truth and Righteousness merely as a God of Might. Elijah, though he wrought so many miracles, was comparatively still a novice when he sat down under the juniper tree.[1]

¶ There are some men indeed who are so self-satisfied, that they see no failure in anything they have ever put their hands to. They have built up the house from foundation to cope without flaw. They are well-satisfied with themselves and their work. They have realized their ideals; and it has escaped their notice, that that has arisen from the fact that their ideals were not of a high character. They have gained the little they aimed at, and they are well pleased because they have hit their mark, forgetting that that required no very lofty aim. Such men will never cast themselves under a juniper tree, bewailing a wasted life. But mark you, the man who is there under the juniper tree is a man of deep life, of high aim, of noble purpose; and the gloom which now overspreads his soul is the shadow cast by the disappointment of one, who, though his harvest is golden and bountiful, has reaped so little and so poorly, in proportion to his expectations, that his whole life appears shorn of all the brightness of colour by the uniform blackness of failure.[2]

7. Worn out with sorrow and hard travelling, he lay down and slept. But while he slept an angel came and touched him, and he awoke to find a cake ready baked and a cruse of water. In obedience to the angel he ate and drank, but, still wearied, lay

[1] F. D. Maurice, *The Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament*, 139.
[2] A. Ewing, *Elijah and Ahab*, 247.

down again. A second time the angel awoke him, bidding him eat as a preparation for a long journey. Elijah had simply been in quest of a refuge from Jezebel, but the God who permitted this had another object. The prophet was to regain his supernormal strength in the place which was fullest of divinity. Far away his steps were guided into the midst of the Sinai desert; for the first time since the days of Moses a prophet broke the solitude of Horeb.

Men flee to the wilderness of Sinai still, when they are wearied with the indifference and vexed with the laxness of those about them. There is an asperity in their frame of mind, a fierce earnestness, a longing, stimulated perhaps by opposition, for a sight of truth as it is; and that easy-going acceptance of it which satisfies most men they will not put up with. And it is the severer forms of truth that we then desire—law, right, justice, a word of God pure and simple. And our toleration for men whose thinking tends to soften truth, to rub away the edges of sharp doctrines, to run every doctrine into a region over which falls a mist of uncertainty, saying "this is mystery—this ends in God—we do not know, we can only guess"—our toleration for minds of this class is then very little. Their hesitation or reserve seems to us but inconsequence or sluggishness; and our mind, with its keen dogmatic edge, will have no compromise, our cry is Sinai, Law. This is the great evil of religious controversy. It drives men to extremes.

¶ A great space in the Ideal Life was given to solitude. "After he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray, and when even was come, he was there alone." It was His way of realizing His undisturbed Communion with the Father. His chosen rest was the solitude in which He retreated from the bustle of the world to the refreshing calm of the eternal. He was the Image of God, in which we too are made; and if we are to realize our true life, of which His was the Model, we must learn to be alone. It is in solitude that we discover the secret of detachment, and realize that supreme relationship which is the fount at once of greatness and of peace—the relationship of the individual soul and God. Solitude is necessary for communion with God. It is in silence that the final truths assert and reveal themselves. It is through the intuitions of silence—the deep soul-convictions which escape words and cannot

brook the atmosphere of the crowd and its chatter—that we reach God. "Be still, and know that I am God."[1]

I hear the soft September rain intone,
And cheerful crickets chirping in the grass,
I bow my head, I, who am all alone;
The light winds see, and shiver as they pass.

No other thing is so bereft as I,—
The rain-drops fall, and mingle as they fall,—
The chirping cricket knows his neighbour nigh,—
Leaves sway responsive to the light wind's call.

But Friend and Lover Thou hast put afar,
And left me only Thy great, solemn sky,—
I try to pierce beyond the farthest star
To search Thee out, and find Thee ere I die;

Yet dim my vision is, or Thou dost hide
Thy sacred splendour from my yearning eyes:
Be pitiful, O God, and open wide
To me, bereft, Thy heavenly Paradise.

Give me one glimpse of that sweet, far-off rest,—
Then I can bear Earth's solitude again;
My soul, returning from that heavenly quest,
Shall smile, triumphant, at each transient pain.

Nor would I vex my heart with grief or strife,
Though Friend and Lover Thou hast put afar,
If I could see, through my worn tent of Life,
The steadfast shining of Thy morning star.[2]

II.

Horeb.

1. At the end of forty days, and still full of despondency, Elijah arrived at the Mount of God. The history of Israel has never touched Horeb since Moses left it, and it is not without significance that we are once more on that sacred ground. The parallel between Moses and Elijah is very real. These two names stand out above all others in the history of the theocracy, the one

[1] Cosmo Gordon Lang, *The Miracles of Jesus.*
[2] Louise Chandler Moulton, *Swallow Flights.*

as its founder, the other as its restorer; both distinguished by special revelations, both endowed with exceptional force of character and power of the Spirit; the one the lawgiver, the other the head of the prophetic order; both having something peculiar in their departure, and both standing together, in witness of their supremacy in the past and of their inferiority in the future, by Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

"The law and the prophets were until John"; but both are now merged in the gospel of Jesus, who is all and in all. Moses and Elijah have long had audience of the people of God; but behold a greater than Moses or Elijah is here, and they must withdraw; and accordingly, when the Voice is silent and the cloud has cleared away, Jesus is left alone. No one remains to divide His authority, and none to share His sorrow. He must tread the winepress alone. Moses and Elijah return to the world of spirits—Jesus, God's beloved Son, to the world of men.

2. Elijah's mission was to restore in Israel the Law given in that very place through Moses. His disappointment would at first be intensified by the sacred associations of the place. In the presence of the wild scenery about him, and with memories of the giving of the Law, he could less than ever understand why the fire from heaven and the clear manifestation of the power of God had not been the beginning of a change which would immediately sweep every trace of Baal-worship from the land. The temper in which Elijah waited on the mountain for a vision of Jehovah is one that we can appreciate—a heavy and restless heart in which welled up both good and bad emotions; where faith was struggling with doubt, and pride with shame, and the impulse to complain against God beat against a longing to trust Him again.

3. Then came the revelation, a magnificent drama of nature in which the elements fought for the mastery. The narrative is spiritually one of the profoundest in the Old Testament. Jehovah represented to Elijah, by a magnificent acted parable, the contrast between law and grace, judgment and mercy. As the prophet of Jehovah, Elijah had been using the weapon of force. He had never conceived it possible to defeat the enemies of God by any

other weapon. He had "magnified God's strictness with a zeal He will not own." And he had failed. Force had left men hard and indifferent. Jehovah here made experiment upon Elijah with his own weapon. He visited the mountain with a hurricane, with an earthquake, and with a fire. The prophet's wounded spirit was not moved by any of these. Jehovah was not in them. But in the calm which followed the tumult he heard a still small voice (R.V. marg. "a sound of gentle stillness") which thrilled his inmost being; he felt that God was there; self-abased, he wrapped his face in his mantle and waited to receive the Divine communications. He was thus taught the meaning of his failure. The priests have been killed, but Jezebel is still on the throne, as strong as ever and much more determined. Force has only aroused force. Compulsion begets compulsion. They that use the sword perish by the sword. Elijah can kill, but so can Jezebel, and she says she will, and will kill *him*. The storm-clouds do their work; earthquakes and fire have their mission in the progress of the universe, but mind is the master of the body, and the soul is superior to the flesh, and God is over all. And though He answers by fire, that is not the best answer He gives to the questions of the spirit of man; that best answer He supplies in the quiet of the inward life, by His gentle patience and forbearance, forgiving mercy and solacing love. The Kingdom of God comes not so much by startling miracles as through quiet human agencies and in the slow movements of history. Elijah is therefore shown that Jehovah has still a great work for him to do: he must shape the destinies of two great nations, and provide for the continuance of the prophetic succession. Three commands are laid upon him: to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to be his own successor—to be a friend of the lonely man, a companion, a comrade, to humanize this son of the desert, to free him of his egotism and broaden his sympathies. And he is comforted with the assurance that the work in which he has been engaged has not been a failure; Jehovah reserves for Himself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

Elijah's methods were tried on himself—power, force, law, Sinai. And the effects were nought. The Lord was not in the earthquake or in the fire. Did the prophet wonder now at the

obdurate king, at the besotted people, at the fickle crowd, at the mad, vindictive queen? What had he been plying them with all his days? With miracle on miracle, a gloomy demeanour, heavens of brass, famine, thirst, death, with law and force. Does he wonder at the result now, after his present experience? Or is not his wonder rather turned in upon himself? He had been enabled to sound the deeps of that conception of God which had all his life fascinated him; he had come to His chosen place, and he found that God was something different from his idea of Him, and that His highest power was not of the kind he imagined. May we not learn something from this? Does not the conception of God which any of us has need to be supplemented? Do we not work somewhat too much on one idea of Him, thinking it perhaps a full one; and, in consequence, our work is less successful than it should be? Perhaps with some of us it is the same defect as marked Elijah's; we rather still adhere to the God of Sinai. Yet there must have been a parable to Elijah in this earthquake and this fire which were powerless, followed by the small voice in which was God Himself—a parable of Sinai and Calvary. And might there not rise up before him some such scene as he was yet to witness and to share on the Mount of Transfiguration, when the thunders of Sinai should die down, and become lower and lower through successive ages, till at last they were succeeded by the still small voice of one who "did not cry nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," but who was "God with us," "unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." "For what the law could not do"—even though wielded by an Elijah—"God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin," did—"condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

¶ The hugeness and immensity of the soul's interests and needs is frequently very oppressive to me. The feeling of exigency is soon suggested and not easily allayed. I need a great deal of actual Divine upholding: "I should have fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord," and I ought the more to love and serve Him; because while my fears are quickly roused and very urgent I am almost habitually raised above them;

but I need to learn more fully what is implied in the promise, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength."[1]

4. Of the three commissions to Elijah, one only was carried out by himself. Elisha was found ploughing his father's field, and was called to his life-work by the casting of the prophet's mantle upon him. Asking that he might bid farewell to his father and mother, he was told to do so, but with the implied warning in the prophet's exclamation, "What have I done to thee!" that his call was for life, and that there could be no return. His total break with the past was symbolized by a sacrificial feast of one of his twelve pair of oxen, boiled on a fire made of the yoke and plough he would use no more. "Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him." The "anointing" of Hazael (not literally performed in his case) and of Jehu was carried out, not by Elijah, but by Elisha.

¶ Elijah belongs to a class of men specially gifted for special purposes. Their weapon is not love, but truth. They are born not to win, but to coerce by will. Self-conquerors, and therefore subduers of men. Hence they are qualified for reformers—they are stern, inflexible. Such men have few loves, and few private affections. Their life is public; their interests national, not private. Hence their characters are sad, for they are separated from sympathy; but hence also are they elevated. The less they have of a home here, the more they make themselves a home in the awful other world, and find sympathy in God. Such a man was the Baptist, and such was Elijah.[2]

¶ Spiritual teachers in all ages have perhaps fallen into the error of Elijah. They have exaggerated; they have gone into extremes, into which those whom they taught could not follow them. It is not necessary to follow them into their extremes. But these extremes are greatly due to their feeling of being isolated, and to the seemingly immovable insensibility of those whom they have to instruct. Cordial co-operation, cordial sympathy in the great general truths of the Faith, will remove these feelings and these exaggerations. And then Christian teaching will become calm, and simple, and natural; and the stream of Christian truth and life, instead of being like a noisy, furious, foaming brook, dashing itself against everything within

[1] *Letters of James Smetham*, 140.
[2] F. W. Robertson, *The Human Race*, 87.

its reach, will advance like a great, broad, placid river, without a wave upon its surface, absorbing into itself, from all sides, every contribution of the thought and life of men, and moving on with a power that nothing can resist.[1]

[1] A. B. Davidson, *The Called of God*, 182.

ELIJAH.

III.

The Later Years.

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The Later Years.

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.—2 Kings ii. 11.

After its culmination in Carmel and Horeb, Elijah's life became less eventful. He came forth again once or twice, as of old, when special circumstances seemed to demand his reappearance in public life, but as a rule he lived in retirement, and in a manner which is less romantic and exciting. It would, however, be a great mistake to conclude that he spent the evening of his days as a hermit or in doing nothing. The truth is, that the last chapter of his life was probably the busiest. How it came about we do not know, but the age of persecution seemed to have passed. A spirit of comparative toleration prevailed. Schools of the prophets were allowed to be established in various places, and Elijah spent his closing years in active superintendence of these. Thus he was taught that the kingdom of darkness in this world is not a fortress which may be taken by assault, but one which will be reduced only by a long and laborious process of sapping and mining. The prophet, when he commenced his ministry, imagined that the idolatry of his country could be overthrown by a stroke. He closed his life-work by organizing a system of means which required the co-operation of many men, and which it took years to carry into effect. The silent and secret influence of these men in Israel would be like the little leaven hidden in the three measures of meal. They would keep alive the light of truth, they would transmit the knowledge of the true God to the next generation, and train up sons of the prophets to succeed them when they were called to their rest. Elijah was now content that his work should be slow and unobtrusive, knowing that only so could it be sure. He trusted no longer to the earthquake or the fire, but to the still small voice which convinces and inspires.

I.

Naboth's Vineyard.

1. When Elijah's moral indignation once more flashes out against the house of Ahab, it is not for the destruction of idolatry but in the cause of justice and humanity that he appears. He has become the champion of the civil and moral rights of the people. Ahab violates the ancient laws of property, which are the charter of the people's liberties, by forcibly alienating the vineyard of Naboth. He deepens his guilt by allowing his wife to compass the innocent man's ruin by peculiarly nefarious means. This crime is the signal for Elijah's reappearance at Jezreel. On the day after Naboth's murder, the king is proceeding in state to take possession of the coveted garden, when, with the lightning-like suddenness so characteristic of all his movements, Elijah, in his hairy garment and leathern girdle, starts up before him, and rolls out the thunder of a new and terrible denunciation: "Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."

Elijah's old heroic faith had revived in him again. His spirit had regained its wonted posture in the presence of Jehovah. His nature had returned to its equipoise in the will of God. It was nothing to him that there rode behind Ahab's chariot two ruthless captains, Jehu and Bidkar. He did not for a moment consider that the woman who had threatened his life before might now take it, maddened as she was with her recent draught of human blood. Every word spoken by Elijah was literally fulfilled. Jehovah put His own seal upon His servant's words.

¶ The Hebrew prophets stood amid their compatriots and denounced the abuses of the times—sensuality, rapacity, cruelty, mal-administration. They were citizens and patriots, and for that very reason they are nearer to us and strike a more modern note than the writers of the New Testament epistles, who were so obsessed with the idea of the near end of all things that the concerns of civic life faded away almost to nothingness. The prophets, so far from reflecting the political and religious opinions of their day, stood alone and made their protest. Every one of them is opposed to the judgment of the multitude, and

their strife is with custom, tradition, the law, popular usage. Nearly all of them were great tragic figures, dwelling in a solitude difficult for our imaginations to picture. Attempts were made to silence them; they were derided and persecuted. It is sufficient to recall the salient facts of the career of Elijah, of Amos, or of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah, concerning whom it was written, "I have made thee this day a strong city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land" (Jer. i. 18). With great differences in temperament and capacity they had certain marked characteristics in common, so that the reader who understands one is in the way to understand all. They had nothing like a creed in common, nothing that could be called the creed of the goodly fellowship of prophets; but they all had an over-mastering sense of a God of righteousness. That sense made and consecrated them prophets, as we use the name. They were distinguished by their realization of righteousness as Divine, which is equivalent to saying that they were called to the office of prophet by their realization of God as a supremely ethical Being.[1]

2. The episode of Naboth's vineyard produced a great change in popular sentiment. It revealed the true character of the issues in Elijah's conflict against idolatry. It showed the people that, while idolatry went hand in hand with injustice and crime, the religion of Jehovah was the bulwark of righteousness and liberty. At the same time, it opened their eyes to the real grandeur of the prophet in their midst, and doubtless we are to date from this event a great increase in his power as the prophet of Jehovah. The nation was full of the spirit of mutiny against the bloody and idolatrous house of Ahab. And, when the prophet went to anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi, so ripe was the time for a change that the army immediately hailed the new monarch, crying, "God save king Jehu!" And the carnage that followed in Ahab's house was terrible and complete.

¶ The measure of Dante's sternness must be found in his intense sense of righteousness. Beyond almost all else but love, his conviction of the eternal rule of truth and righteousness possesses his soul. All his prepossessions, his theological theories, his political preferences, his tastes, and his personal sympathies must give way before the demands of the eternal right. He was

[1] B. J. Snell, *The Value of the Old Testament*, 128.

a true Catholic: he had reverence for the Holy See; he took a deep interest in doctrinal discussions and conformed his views to those of recognized doctors of the Church; but greater than all ecclesiastical or theological matters was the ethical order of the universe; he could submit theories to orthodox opinions and customs to Church rule, but he could not put his conscience in pawn or believe that official authority could set aside the everlasting laws of righteousness.[1]

¶ The history of Europe has been a history of struggles to be free from injustice and tyranny. Too frequently hasty and ill-considered measures were adopted, and appeals to arms ended in slaughter. The marvel is that freedom was ever gained anywhere, considering the subject state of the oppressed, and the power and influence of the oppressors. Holland and Switzerland, Italy and Scotland, and many more downtrodden States, are free to-day, because they refused to accept as impracticable all attempts to gain their freedom. Submission to injustice is right within limits, but it shall not be for ever. My poor forefathers were shot like partridges on the moors of Scotland, because they claimed the right to worship God as their conscience led them; and, strange to say, it was a rampant ecclesiasticism which prompted the persecution. I do not defend the Covenanters in their methods of resistance. The times were wild, and no hand to help, and much allowance should be made for desperate provocation and bloody treatment. But few men can enter into the heart of a Covenanter unless his blood is in their veins, or unless they themselves are brought face to face with the re-enacted horrors of the past.[2]

II.

Fire from Heaven.

After the tragic meeting of Elijah and Ahab at the vineyard of Naboth we hear nothing more of Elijah for four years. It would seem that he had again retired to some secluded spot, possibly about Carmel, and thence issued forth to visit the schools of the prophets, over which he exercised a great influence. During these years, considerable changes had taken place in Israel. The idolatries of Ahab were carried on by his like-minded son Ahaziah. His reign lasted only two years, his death being due

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 98.
[2] *Mackay of Uganda*, 348.

to an accident. He fell "through a lattice in his upper chamber." Characteristically, he sent messengers to inquire at the shrine of some Philistine divinity, Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he should recover. His messengers, however, never reached their destination, and speedily returned. Interrogated by their master why they had returned, they declared they had been met on their way by a man who had delivered this message to them: "Is it because there is no god in Israel, that ye go to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Now therefore thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from the bed whither thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." The messengers do not seem to have been aware who this singular man was; but the suddenness of his appearance, the unusual character of his mien, the solemnity of his manner, the sense of certainty and authority with which he spoke, had overpowered them.

When Ahaziah heard their account, accompanied with a description of the appearance of him who had so strangely intercepted them, he knew at once that Elijah had been with them; and his heart was filled with bitterest enmity and fiercest rage. Three times he sent a detachment of fifty soldiers to apprehend the prophet, who had gone to the top of a hill. Twice in answer to the peremptory command of the leader, "The king hath said, Come down," the majesty of Jehovah was vindicated, as on Mount Carmel, by "fire from heaven," which consumed the soldiers. The third captain and his band were, however, spared in answer to the humble prayer of the captain that their lives might be "precious" in the prophet's sight. Going down with them from the hill, Elijah went to the king, repeated his message of doom, and was allowed to go unscathed. It was apparently his last public act.

¶ This narrative differs widely in language, style, and spirit from those of the preceding group. The prophet's personal appearance has altered; his name has changed from אליהו to the later form אליה; and instead of being directly inspired and guided by Jehovah as hitherto, he receives the word of prophecy from an angel. "The representation of the prophet assumes gigantic proportions, but at the same time becomes rigid and lifeless; it ceases to be available as a pattern of human action" (Ewald). The narrator tells the story, without apology, for the glorification of his hero; but no narrative in the Old Testament

presents greater moral difficulties. If it is regarded as literal history, one's moral sense is shocked at the destruction of a great number of men whose only fault is obedience to the orders of their captain and their king. One cannot conceive the story to have been penned by the historian who related the parable of the still small voice at Horeb. The best comment on the story was supplied by Christ. He condemned with unmistakable plainness the vindictive spirit which His disciples, by citing the example of Elijah, sought to justify. Others besides the disciples have used the story as an argument for persecution. Elijah was the patron of the Inquisitors. Even Calvin and Beza argued from this narrative that fire was the proper instrument of punishment for heretics. But the story itself can hardly be regarded as history. It is rather one of those imaginative apologues—abundant in the schools of the scribes—which borrowed the names of ancient heroes to lend vividness and concreteness to abstract doctrines.[1]

III.

The Chariot of Fire.

1. The closing scene in Elijah's life is wrapped in mystery. Intimation had been given to the prophet of his near departure, and apparently also of the triumphant manner of that departure. Life had been a hard battle to him. He had stood alone in maintaining the great cause; for though he was signally mistaken in supposing that he was the only worshipper of Jehovah, the only man who was taking a decided stand in the interests of true religion, he had really stood alone in some of the great crises of his life. His work was done. He had fought a tough battle, and brought it to a successful issue. He must often have longed for rest—to be beyond the turmoil and the trouble. He had been strong, and brave, and fearless. He had endured much of the contradiction of sinners against himself. He had served his God faithfully, steadfastly, and to the end. He had experienced his hours of weakness and reverse also. But in the main, his life had been characterized by unfaltering faithfulness, untiring obedience, unflinching adherence to duty and the call of God. He had been stern and unbending, to use the words that have often been

[1] J. Strachan.

used in all ages of the whole class to which he belonged. The times called for just such a man—a man to whom truth and righteousness are everything, who never diverges from the path through earthly passion, who never hesitates about the course he is to pursue because those considerations hover about him which allure other men, or make them vacillating. And the one exhibition of weakness that we see in him is the reaction which follows upon a period of strained activity, and the failure to realize that high measure of success which he has so ardently sought, and so earnestly prayed for.

¶ The man whom Nature has appointed to do great things is, first of all, furnished with that openness to Nature which renders him incapable of being *in*sincere! To his large, open, deep-feeling heart Nature is a Fact: all hearsay is hearsay; the unspeakable greatness of this Mystery of Life, let him acknowledge it or not, nay even though he seem to forget it or deny it, is ever present to *him*,—fearful and wonderful, on this hand and on that. He has a basis of sincerity; unrecognized, because never questioned or capable of question. Mirabeau, Mahomet, Cromwell, Napoleon: all the Great Men I ever heard of have this as the primary material of them. Innumerable commonplace men are debating, are talking everywhere their commonplace doctrines, which they have learned by logic, by rote, at second-hand: to that kind of man all this is still nothing. He must have truth; truth which *he* feels to be true. How shall he stand otherwise? His whole soul, at all moments, in all ways, tells him that there is no standing. He is under the noble necessity of being true.[1]

2. For the last time Elijah surveyed, from the heights of the western Gilgal, the whole scene of his former career—the Mediterranean Sea, Carmel, and the distant hills of Gilead—and went the round of the consecrated haunts of Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho. One faithful disciple was with him—Elisha, who would not be persuaded to leave his master's side. Ever and again, the answer to his "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel, to Jericho, to Jordan" was, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." At Bethel, and at Jericho, the students in the schools that had gathered round those sacred spots came out with the sad presentiment that for the last time they were to see the revered instructor who had given new life to

[1] Carlyle, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*.

their studies; and they turned to their fellow-disciple: "Knowest thou not that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" Elisha silenced them, half in sorrow, half in anger: sorrow for his own approaching loss, anger at hearing that which was so sacred and precious to himself lightly spoken of. He would cling to his master to the last, come what might. At length the two stood together by the side of the Jordan. Elijah smote the waters with his mantle, and they parted and made room for the two friends to pass over on dry ground.

¶ Jordan has not only been associated with the figures of two of Israel's greatest prophets—Elijah and John the Baptist—but with the bestowal, at their hands, of the Spirit upon their successors. We are not to be surprised that as his end approached Elijah should feel himself driven towards that border, across which he had first burst so mysteriously upon Israel, and to which he had withdrawn while waiting for his word to accomplish itself. Stage by stage, he came down from the high centre of the land to its lowest, lonely, crumbling shelves. So he and Elisha, leaving the sons of the prophets behind, passed down the falling land as the great planets pass to their setting through the groups of lesser stars. The mountains of The-Other-Side filled the view ahead of them, and in these mountains lay the sepulchre of Moses. He, who in his helplessness had already fled for new inspiration to Horeb, could not fail to wonder whether God was to lay him to rest beside his forerunner on Nebo. In front there was no promised land visible—nothing but that high sky-line eastward with the empty heaven above it. Behind there was no nation waiting to press into the future—nothing but that single follower who persisted in following to the end. And so, the story tells us, the end came. The river that had drawn back at a nation's feet parted at the stroke of one man, and as he suddenly passed away to the God from whom he had suddenly come, it was one man whom he acknowledged as his heir, and to whom he left his spirit. Realize these two lonely figures standing in that unpeopled wilderness, the State invisible, the Church left behind in impotent gaze and wonder, and nothing passing between these two men except from the one the tribute to personal worth, and from the other the influence of personal spirit and force—realize all this on the lonely bank of Jordan, and you understand the beginnings of prophecy — the new dispensation in which the instrument of the Most High was to be not the State and its laws, not the army and its victories, not even the Church and her fellowship, but the spirit of the individual man. Not in vain does

the story tell us that it was with his mantle, symbol above all things of the Prophet, that Elijah smote the waters, and that Elisha smote them the second time on his return to his ministry. Jordan, that had owned the People of God, owns now the Prophet.[1]

3. And now they were on that farther shore, under the shade of those hills of Pisgah and of Gilead where, in former times, a prophet, greater even than Elijah, had been withdrawn from the eyes of his people; whence, in his early youth, Elijah himself had descended in his august career. He knew that his hour was come; he knew that he had at last returned home; that he was to go whither Moses had gone before him; his passions came back to all their first obedience, and to all their former splendid service, as he stood by Jordan and waited for his signal from God.

He turned to Elisha to ask for his last wish. One only gift was in Elisha's mind to ask: he asked "a double portion" of his master's spirit—not twice Elijah's inspiration, but the portion of an eldest son, who received twice as much as the younger sons (Deut. xxi. 17). Elijah replied that it was a hard request. Spiritual gifts are the most difficult of all to transmit. Nevertheless, he assured his follower that, if he proved his fitness for prophetic gifts by remaining with his master to the end, and looking without fear on the dread messengers of the invisible world, his request would not be denied. And as they still went on—upwards, it may be, towards the eastern hills, talking as they went—"behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder." This was the severance of the two friends. Then came a furious storm. "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." And Elisha *saw* it. He gazed without flinching upon the strange and marvellous vision, and cried after the departing friend, "My father, my father; the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

The fiery chariot and the horses were the emblem of Jehovah of Hosts. To behold this emblem was pledge of perceiving the manifestation of God, unseen by the world, and of being its herald and messenger, as Elijah had been. Beyond the fact that Elijah so went up to heaven, and that the symbolic manifestation of

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 493.

Jehovah of Hosts was visible to Elisha—Holy Scripture does not tell us anything. And it seems both wiser and more reverent not to speculate further on questions connected with the removal of Elijah, the place whither, and the state to which he was "translated." If we put aside such inquiries—since we possess not the means of pursuing them to their conclusions—there is nothing in the simple Scriptural narrative, however miraculous, that transcends the general sphere of the miraculous, or that would mark this as so exceptional an instance that the ordinary principles for viewing the miracles of Scripture would not apply to it.

Elijah's end was in keeping with his career. From his first abrupt appearance it had been fitly symbolized by the stormy wind and flaming fire which he heard and saw at Horeb, and now these were the vehicles which swept him into the heavens. He came like a whirlwind, he burned like a fire, and in fire and whirlwind he disappeared.

¶ The actual translation of Elijah is recorded in those words: "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Compare with this the Ascension of our blessed Lord: "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." The placing of one account side by side with the other is very instructive, and suggests many points of comparison. Elijah is translated, a chariot of fire and horses of fire are commissioned to snatch him away from the earth, and carry him to heaven; but our Lord is borne upward by His innate power; He is not translated, He ascends. He came from heaven, and He returns to heaven, as to His natural home. The wonder is, not that He should now at length go to heaven, but that He should so long have tarried upon earth. Calmly, majestically, He ascends, carrying with Him that body which He had redeemed from the grave. No fire-chariot is needed for Him; and why? There is nothing of earthly dross requiring to be burnt out of Him, no wondrous transformation, no last baptism of cleansing fire before He can endure to pass into the presence of His Father; but such as He was upon earth, exactly such He passes into the heavens. No shock, no whirlwind, no violent rapture in His case; for in His Ascension there is no breach of the laws of His natural life, but all is in exactest conformity with them. Surely in all this matter the comparison between the servant and the Son brings out to us the greatness indeed of both; but at the same

time the transcendent superiorities of the Son, who in all things hath the pre-eminence.[1]

4. Elijah was thus removed from the scene of his labours before the whole task laid upon him was finished. But Elisha and others entered into his labours; sons of the prophets animated by his spirit were raised up in hundreds, his teaching spread, his spirit penetrated the nation. Then the harvest was reaped. After two short reigns the idolatrous house of Ahab fell. The enemies of Jehovah and Elijah perished. Superstition dies hard, but there was never again any question of rivalry between Jehovah and Baal. There was no more danger of Baal-worship becoming the national religion. It sank into the superstition of a sect, known to later prophets as the *remnant* of Baal (Zeph. i. 4).

¶ The consequences of the struggle with the Tyrian Baal and of the victory of Jahvism were most important. Had the issue of the conflict been different, the existence of the Jahveh-worship would have been at stake; the averting of this danger alone was an important result. But further, from this period onward we find Jahvism enjoying undisputed possession of the honour and privileges of a national religion. We learn nothing more of any attempts to drive it from that position. It is true that the worship of other gods and the combination of their service with that of Jahveh still goes on, but the belief in "Jahveh the god of Israel" is assailed no longer. The prophets of the eighth century B.C. are able to start from it as an universal conviction. For this firm foundation for their preaching they had to thank Elijah and his school. But much more important still was the influence of the war between Baal and Jahveh upon the minds of those who had remained loyal to Jahveh and had stood in the breach for His cause. The saying that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church" was verified in this case also. Jahveh became more dear to them, their dependence upon Him more earnest than before, now that they had to bear persecution for His sake. Jahveh, His nature, His character, the difference between Him and the other gods: all this, through the course of events, becomes, for His faithful adherents, a subject of serious reflection, not exactly of calm, philosophical enquiry, but of that kind of meditation in which the voice of heart and conscience can make itself heard. The immediate future was to show what has since

[1] Archbishop Trench, *Sermons New and Old*, 6.

been confirmed by long experience, that "great thoughts come from the heart."[1]

5. Elijah's moral power lay in the simplicity of his faith. He realized intensely the belief in Jehovah, and lived a heroic life in the strength of it. "Jehovah before whom I stand" was his favourite formula. He stood erect and haughty before kings; but in the presence of Jehovah he wrapped his head in his mantle, or crouched to the ground with his face between his knees. Stern and rugged by nature, a prophet moulded for heroic work in evil days, he was led through an experience which awakened in him the tenderness that is to be found only in union with strength. His personal history, especially the narrative of the breakdown and restoration of his faith, brings him into touch with human beings in all ages. He is so great that readers of his story are not unthankful for his failings. We echo the words of St. James and are thankful for them: "Elijah was a man of like passions with us."

¶ Elijah is the foremost of those great leaders of religion whom we call *par excellence* the Hebrew prophets. He "introduced into prophecy," says Kittel (*History of the Hebrews*, ii. 266), "that species of categorical imperative which distinguishes him as well as the later prophets; that brazen inflexibility, that diamond-like hardness of character which bids them hold fast by their moral demand, even should the nation be dashed to pieces against it." Moreover, the active life of Elijah illustrated the extent to which the prophets made their influence felt in the nation's public life. They exercised their ministry in close relation to the political circumstances of their time. They have been truly called "watchmen of the theocracy," since they habitually followed with close interest the course of events, whether political or religious, and regarded it as their duty to intervene in public affairs from time to time in order to bring to the remembrance of their countrymen those fundamental religious truths on which the theocratic state was based, namely, that Jehovah alone was Israel's God, that Israel was His chosen people, and that His supreme requirement was the observance by the nation of the revealed law of righteousness. Thus they aimed at keeping Israel faithful to Jehovah, as He had manifested Himself at Sinai—as a God who delighted in pure worship, in righteous dealing, and in fraternal charity between man and man.[2]

[1] Kuenen, *The Religion of Israel*, i. 360.
[2] R. L. Ottley, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 9.

Servant of God, thy fight is fought;
Servant of God, thy crown is wrought:
Lingerest thou yet upon the joyless earth?
Thy place is now in Heaven's high bowers,
Far from this mournful world of ours,
Among the sons of light, that have a different birth.

Sons of the Prophets, do ye still
Look through the wood and o'er the hill,
For him, your lord, whom ye may ne'er behold?—
O dreamers, call not him, when day
Fades in the dewy vale away,
Nor when glad morning crests the lofty rocks with gold!

Peace! call that honoured name no more,
By Jordan's olive-girdled shore,
By Kedron's brook, or Siloa's holy fount;
Nor where the fragrant breezes rove
Through Bethel's dim and silent grove,
Nor on the rugged top of Carmel's sacred mount.

Henceforth ye never more may meet,
Meek learners, at your master's feet,
To gaze on that high brow, those piercing eyes;
And hear the music of that voice
Whose lessons bade the sad rejoice,
Said to the weak "Be strong," and to the dead "Arise!"

Vain, vain! it is enough to know
That in his pilgrimage below
He wrought Jehovah's will with steadfast zeal;
And that he passed from this our life
Without the sorrow of the strife
Which all our fathers felt, which we must one day feel.

But still a firm and faithful trust
Supports, consoles the pure and just:
Serene, though sad, they feel life's joys expire;
And bitter though the death pang be,
Their spirits through its tortures see
Elijah's car of light, Elijah's steeds of fire.[1]

[1] *Poems of Winthrop Mackworth Praed*, ii. 304.

ELISHA.

I.

Master and Disciple.

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Master and Disciple.

Elisha the son of Shaphat . . . which poured water on the hands of Elijah.—2 Kings iii. 11.

1. The contrast between Elijah and Elisha is in every way great. We pass at a step from the desert to the city, from the rude hermit to the polished citizen, from the lonely heart of fire to the serene and stately friend of nobles and princes, from a life of wandering, buffeting, and disappointment to a settled, triumphant, and admired career. Elijah had been reared among the wilds of Gilead, and in person and character had something of the ruggedness of his own mountains. He loved the solitude of the hills, and shunned the life of the city. His appearance was the signal of Divine judgment; his words were followed by terrible manifestations of Divine power and vengeance. Elisha, on the other hand, had been brought up in the quiet, agricultural district of Abel-meholah. His dress was the ordinary garment of the East. He was the very opposite of "the hairy man" whose shaggy appearance was so well known and so feared by the king of Israel. He had a house of his own in Samaria, and was accessible to kings, to the elders of the city, to the Shunammite woman, to the foreigner from Damascus. While faithful to the work and ministry of Jehovah, and stern in his rebuke, he was yet ready to help the king against his foes, and to meet the difficulties of Naaman in a way which would have been strange to the unbending Elijah. He could be stern and unrelenting in his dealings with a nation which rebelled against the rule of Israel, but he could also show extraordinary kindness to the foes of his country. Most of his miracles were in aid of the poor and the distressed—domestic works rather than public.

2. As a prophet Elisha had no new truth to proclaim. He began where Elijah left off. Elijah had fought a battle single-

handed, and against great odds. Elisha entered into the fruit of his labours. Elijah was undoubtedly the grander character. Elisha was great only so far as he continued and carried out with more force than any other man of his time the work which Elijah had begun—the task of defending the ancient religion with a courage which nothing could shake. Elisha's single aim was to complete the reforms begun by Elijah—to re-establish the ancient truth, and repel heathen superstition. Himself contending with immovable steadfastness for the old religion, he became, through the great spirit bestowed upon him, a refuge for all the faithful; even from beyond the limits of Israel he was sought as a great prophet; he was the head of the prophets who lived for the religion of Jehovah; he was the protection and comfort of numbers of the pious and devout among the people; he was a healer of much misery, and a living instrument of manifold blessings; Elijah was the soldier whose work it was to win battles, to break down resistance, and to scatter his foes. Elisha was the man to rule the province thus gained, to maintain the ground won by his predecessor, and to bring the influence of the new rule to bear upon all parts. In this honoured work, so different from that of Elijah, he lived in the exercise of a constantly increasing influence for the long period of fifty years.

3. It is impossible to arrange the events of Elisha's life in chronological sequence. While the topography of the narrative is often precise, there is a singular want of definiteness as to personal names and dates. The only indication of time afforded by several of the anecdotes is the mention of the "king of Israel"; but as no name is specified, the reader is left to conjecture which of the four kings who were the prophet's contemporaries may be referred to. It is impossible to say in whose reign the cure of Naaman or the attempt of the Syrians to capture Elisha took place. In some cases occurrences are obviously grouped together, according to the connexion of their contents. In others no principle of arrangement is apparent, and the loose connexion of the narratives becomes very awkward. For instance, the siege of Samaria by the Syrians is described immediately after it has been stated that "the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." The visit of Joash to

Elisha during the prophet's last illness is related just after the mention of the death of Joash. Most of Elisha's deeds and experiences are set down before the account of Jehu's revolution; but the prophet lived forty-five years after that event, and his influence in the nation was certainly greater and his deeds of beneficence were probably more numerous after than before the overthrow of his enemies.

The narratives are for the most part a record of Elisha's activity as a seer, diviner, and worker of miracles, rather than as a prophet in the usual sense of the word. He suspends the laws of nature, foresees future events, divines the secret thoughts of men, and knows what events are happening out of sight or at a distance.

I.

The Mantle of Prophecy.

1. Elisha was God's gift to Elijah in his dark hour. He had scarcely uttered, in magnificent despair, his burning words, "I, even I only, am left," when God gave him the name of a young man already fit to be anointed as prophet in his room. Elijah could recognize no kindred spirit, except in the sudden flame of Carmel's fire, but God could discern the possible reformer in a young farmer at the plough, as He had already discovered Gideon on the hidden threshing-floor. Whether Elijah had any previous knowledge of Elisha or not, the direction given was sufficiently clear to enable him to find his successor. Abel-meholah was situated in a rich agricultural district in the country of Manasseh, on the west side of Jordan. In a field there Elijah found the man he sought. There were twelve yoke of oxen, each yoke ploughing a furrow. The last of the twelve men, following each his plough, was Elisha the son of Shaphat. Into the midst of this peaceful and busy scene came Israel's renowned prophet, and passing over to Elisha, cast his mantle upon him. Probably no word was spoken. The mantle was the sign of prophetic office and power, and the symbolic act was at once apprehended by Elisha. For a moment he stood in amazement, not unmingled with awe, at the high calling thus suddenly come to him. When

he fully came to himself, Elijah had passed on, and was already leaving the field. The call was given, but he to whom it was given was left absolutely free to accept and obey it or not as he willed. The casting of the mantle conveyed the call; Elisha's conscience interpreted it, and his will accepted it.

2. He ran after Elijah at once and asked permission to kiss his father and mother before leaving all to follow him. This request is proof of how heartily and definitely he accepted the commission; how ready he was, at the call of God, to break with the life of ease, and take up the hard work of a prophet to an unwilling people. The response of Elijah has seemed to some to convey a rebuke, as if he were "indignant at this re-awakening of desire for the world." But this request meant the forsaking of the world, not the desire for it. The fact that Elisha did return indicates that the man who heard the words did not take them as a rebuke. They meant in all probability simply that Elijah refused all responsibility in the matter, referring the young neophyte to his Lord, from whom the call had come.

¶ Elijah was no hard Stoic, unnaturally trampling on the sweet affections of the soul. He was no despotic spiritual guide full of gloomy superstition, like the grim Spaniard, Ignatius Loyola, who seemed to hold that God liked even our needless anguish and our voluntary self-tortures as an acceptable sacrifice to Himself. When St. Francis Xavier, on the journey of the first Jesuits to Rome, passed quite near the castle of his parents and ancestors, the teachings of Loyola would not suffer the young noble to turn aside to print one last kiss upon his mother's cheek. Such hard exactions belong to that sphere of will-worship and voluntary humility which St. Paul condemns. Excessive violence needlessly inflicted on our innocent affections finds no sanction either in ancient Judaism or in genuine Christianity.[1]

3. Elisha rose to the height of that day's call. He turned back to the oxen and servants, he took the yoke of oxen he himself was using, he killed them, lighted a fire with the ploughshare, cooked their flesh, and feasted his servants. He would have them know that what he was doing he was doing with a glad and a happy heart; he would show them that the day God calls him

[1] F. W. Farrar.

is no day of sorrow and mourning, but is a red-letter day in his life. Then, leaving father, mother, servants, cattle, and land, his good position, and his comfortable home, he set forth to follow the homeless wanderer. The irrevocableness of his decision, and the joyful alacrity with which he acted upon it, are both indicated by the slaughter of the oxen and the feast with the farm-servants in the open field. The feast, though not perhaps a sacrificial priestly act, had a distinctly religious aspect. It was the formal separation from his past life, and devotion to the new sphere opening up before him. In killing the yoke of oxen with which he had been ploughing, and using the wood of the plough to make the fire, he plainly indicated his final and voluntary separation from the quiet life in Abel-meholah, and the definite surrender of himself to the call and the will of God.

¶ From Paris, his business completed, he set forth for Strassburg; but knowing that the direct route was barred by the war, Calvin made a long detour, reaching Geneva in the latter half of July, and intending to pass only a single night in the city before resuming his journey to the Rhineland. His presence was made known to Guillaume Farel, who was struggling to maintain the Evangelical cause in the recently formed city. Farel, always fiery and eloquent, urged and adjured Calvin to stay and aid in the difficult endeavour. It was a moment of far-reaching decision, for Calvin recognized, as he believed, the Divine call, and, if God had spoken, His voice was to be obeyed. "Farel kept me at Geneva," he said, writing of the event, "not so much by advice and entreaty as by a dreadful adjuration, as if God had stretched forth His hand upon me from on high to arrest me." That the task was hard and unexpected was no reason why that Divine summons should be disregarded. God, he thought, had set before him the work to be done. He would enter on it.[1]

II.

The Spirit of Elijah.

1. After his call, Elisha practically vanishes from the Scripture narrative for a time; there is no record of his intercourse with Elijah for some ten years. But master and disciple

[1] Williston Walker, *John Calvin*, 158.

reappear together at Gilgal, when Elijah is about to start on his great last journey. The great prophet who so long had been a bulwark for God against the forces of evil was to be taken away. Elijah told Elisha that the Lord had called him to go to Bethel, and asked him to remain behind. But Elisha would not part from him. The sons of the prophets at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and told him that it had been revealed to them that to-day his master would be taken away. It had been revealed to him, too, only it was impossible for him to speak of it. "I know it," he says, "hold ye your peace." Again Elijah said to him, "Tarry here, for the Lord hath sent me to Jericho." And again he said, "I will not leave thee." The sons of the prophets at Jericho came forth to tell him that his master would be taken away; and again he said, "I know it; hold ye your peace." Once more Elijah told him to tarry there, for the Lord had sent him to pass over Jordan; but he broke out with a great cry, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." And so they two went on.

2. With the deep sympathy that came from a sense of his own infirmities and failures, Elijah gazed on the eager face of his disciple. He longed, before his voice was still for ever on earth, to be of some service to him. He longed to spare him, if so it might be, some of his own sorrows and trials, to leave him some part of the legacy which he had gained. With yearning heart Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee." And the young man looked up at him and saw the scars of all the fights, saw the lines upon his face, read the records of his troubles in every furrow in his brow and every line upon his cheek, knew that it all meant peril and danger and hardship and suffering, and his heart swelled within his bosom as he turned to him and said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

¶ God is a Spirit, in so far as He is not locked up in the invariable order of the world; and there is a spirit in Man, in so far as he is not disposed of by his organism and his dwelling-place, but rises in thought and directs himself in affection to what is above them. Here, then, it is that there is room for true communion, that Spirit may meet Spirit, and that the sacred silence may itself speak the exchange of love. The life with

God, then, of which saintly men in every age have testified, is no illusion of enthusiasm, but an ascent, through simple surrender, to the higher region of the soul, the very watch-tower whence there is the clearest and the largest view.[1]

3. Elisha was not asking, of course, that the spirit which had animated and inspired Elijah might be doubled in his case; but (as the margin of the Revised Version informs us) that he might be given the double portion of the firstborn, the heir. The old Jewish law required that, when the father died and his property was to be distributed, the firstborn son should have a double portion. "So give me of thy spirit," he prayed, "that I may be thy true successor. Make me thine heir by giving me thy spirit." It was a wise and noble request. It showed how true already was the spiritual insight of the new prophet. He craved not his leader's miraculous powers, not his magnetic influence, not his indomitable will, but his spirit, which he recognized to be the true secret of his work. He knew the greatness of his master's heart; he knew its nobility and grandeur. He appreciated its troubles and its trials; he recognized their permanent results. In the silent sympathy of daily companionship he had absorbed the contents of the records of his master's soul. He knew, and loved, and venerated him. He thought of nothing better, he wished for nothing higher, than to follow with increased zeal in his steps. He longed only to pursue the labour which Elijah had begun—pursue it with the same steadfastness and the same resolute devotion. But if he inherited the sacred burden, he must also be made heir of the blessing. So he asked for the portion of the firstborn, for recognition as his master's natural heir. And as we read the account of Elisha's ministry, we cannot but feel that his prayer was the fitting prelude of the life which followed it, a life quite equal in its own way to that of Elijah; with all its tenderness so strong, and so full of deep abiding intercourse with God, that it fills a leading place in Old Testament history as a type of power and gentleness combined, which is the true ideal of the man of God.

¶ Many years after, a little group of men, on the Mount of Olives, saw a sight as wonderful as that Elisha saw. They were

[1] James Martineau, *Essays, Reviews and Addresses*, iv. 579.

gathered round their Master, who was dearer to them than Elijah was to Elisha. He was saying His last words to them, when suddenly He was parted from them; He rose higher and higher into the blue sky until a cloud received Him out of their sight, and He was taken noiselessly, quietly, peacefully, up into heaven. But He left behind Him a legacy, a double legacy. He left it to the company of disciples who saw Him ascend; but, thank God, He left it not only to them, but to the Church of God in all ages. What was the twofold legacy which the Christ left to His people? He left them His Spirit and His work. And that legacy has been left to each of us. The question is, Have we received it? The postman leaves a letter at our door, which tells us that a legacy of £1000 has been left to us, and instructs us to apply at a certain place where the money will be handed over to us. That money is left to us, but we must apply for it before we can receive it. God's letter is in our hands to-day, His word of truth. In it we read of the Lord's double legacy left to us. Have we ever applied for it? Have we ever received it? Have we claimed the first part of the legacy, the Spirit of God? Are we filled with the Spirit? Is the Spirit moving us, strengthening us, filling us with Divine power? Now what about the work? What are we doing for the Master? Are we carrying on His work? Are we day by day serving Him and toiling for Him? No one can be poor who has such a glorious legacy. His Spirit *must* make us rich, His work *must* make us happy. Have we claimed the legacy? Or does the Lord say to us to-day, as He said to His disciples, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full"?[1]

4. What is the answer to Elisha's prayer? Surely most remarkable, however we explain it. "Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." Elisha had asked a hard thing, which it was not in any man's power to grant. Not hard in the sense that Elisha's work would be greater or more terrible, that it would require a larger measure of Divine interference in the affairs of men; but hard because it belongs to the spiritual life, the working of which is conditioned by the grace of God and the faith of man; hard because the conflict of the spiritual life is not that of controversy or agitation, or clamour of sect, or jealousy of party, but that of the soul, too intense for words,

[1] O. F. Walton.

battling for right. But Elijah could give him a sign by which to know whether God designated and would qualify him to be his successor. If he saw it all, when Elijah was taken from him, then —but only then—would it be as he had asked. It is as if Elijah said in so many words: "My spirit, the spirit which you are seeking, is the spirit of vision, of insight, of the power to penetrate the world of the visible and the temporal to the world of the invisible and eternal, of the eye that looks not at the seen but at the unseen. If in this you are like me, then my spirit is and shall be yours, and through it shall flow into your work the energy and the power of the seer's faith." Spiritual perception is ever the condition of spiritual work.

¶ The appearances which accompanied Elijah's departure were spiritual, and spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The chariot of fire and horses of fire are said to be of fire because this brilliant and subtle element is the material symbol which best represents the intangible glory of the spiritual world; but of course they were not horses made of material fire. They were a spiritual appearance. Just as the painter Blake said that when looking at the sun it was not the material sun he saw, but ethereal powers and beauties hidden from the bodily eye, so Elisha saw what was hidden from the sons of the prophets on the opposite bank of the river. Manifestly this power of beholding the invisible, and of relying upon supernatural aid for his country, was the surest evidence that Elisha had a large measure of the prophetic spirit; of that spirit which could enable him to represent God's will among His people. Spiritual vision is the source of spiritual strength. He who sees with the distinctness of bodily vision the realities which belong to the spiritual world has a strength to which nothing seems impossible. He to whose inward eye the chariots of fire which accompany God's servants are clearly discernible, cannot but have a courage and a hope not given to every man. It was this seeing of things invisible, this walking with God, this immovable persuasion that God means good to the world, is ever working towards a perfectly righteous kingdom, that gave Elijah and Elisha their strength, fidelity, and success in dark and evil days. And in our day, as in theirs, the men who do most of God's work in the world are those who see powers about us which are not of earth. It is a great step gained when we discard the notion that God is a mere spectator and not an energetic worker in this world. We cannot too emphatically tell ourselves that with Divine energy God is now working in the

world, spending among us the life and force that ever and unceasingly flow forth from the Divine nature.[1]

5. And "*Elisha saw*": he comprehended to the full the moral significance of the great prophetic life as "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." It was not simply that he saw "a chariot of fire and horses of fire," or that he saw his master in one startling last glimpse; but he saw also how the true prophet of God is the nation's defence and bulwark. He had asked a hard thing, but he asked it with the capacity to receive it; and the holiness and consistency of his character and influence were the results of his prayer and of the desire that prompted it.

Then Elisha was left alone, alone to go back to fulfil the long, weary toil of the many years of the prophet's work, in the midst of a gainsaying and rebellious people. But as he went back to fulfil his mission, there came to him a new power for his work; a power which had hitherto been unknown to him. The hard thing he had asked had been granted, the double portion of the spirit of Elijah had been given to him; and as the sign and token thereof he saw lying at his feet the mantle of the prophet which had fallen from him. Elisha stooped down and took it to him, and then he "went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan." He stood, a lone man, his master taken away from his head that day, the sour stream of Jordan gliding at his feet; he looked down on it and gathered the forces of his soul for an act which would put his fate to the test. "He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" And behold, Elijah's God was with Elisha, and he too went over. And the sons of the prophets, looking on from afar, cried out that the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha, and they met him and bowed themselves before him.

Thus began a prophetic career in Northern Israel which lasted for more than half a century, during the reigns of Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash.

¶ Elisha was, like his master, a man of special spiritual gifts, and exercised a scarcely less powerful influence on his contemporaries. Most significant is the very decided part played by Elisha in the revolution which led to the downfall of Ahab's dynasty and raised Jehu to the throne of Israel. In his conduct at this crisis

[1] M. Dods.

Elisha was resolutely carrying out the religious policy of his predecessor Elijah, whose constant aim had been the total extirpation of Baal-worship. The career of these two great prophets illustrates very clearly the functions of a Hebrew prophet. A prophet was a man guided and inspired by God, and acting under commission from Him; a man who looked at contemporary history in the light of those great religious ideas which Moses had transmitted; a watchman who kept his eyes open for the signs of the times and who warned his countrymen of the impending judgments of God; an "incarnate conscience" who perceived and presented in its true light all that was unjust or corrupt in the ordinary life and social arrangements of his time; who recognized in history, and especially in the disasters which befell his nation, the warnings and the chastisements of Almighty God. Nor can we justly estimate the influence of the Hebrew prophets unless we bear in mind the relation in which they stood to the nation as a whole. The truths which they preached stood in striking contrast with popular religion. They were successively raised up by the Holy Spirit not as representatives of the beliefs and practices of average Hebrew religion, but as champions who never ceased to struggle against the down-grade tendencies, customs, and beliefs of their countrymen. Their preaching could not fail to be unpalatable to the mass of the people, for the simple reason that the God whom the prophets proclaimed was quite other than He was popularly supposed to be.[1]

[1] R. L. Ottley, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 12.

ELISHA.

II.

The Man of Miracles.

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The Man of Miracles.

An holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.—2 Kings iv. 9.
All the great things that Elisha hath done.—2 Kings viii. 4.

Elisha is the subject of a number of narratives in the Second Book of Kings which not only cursorily mention him in connexion with a larger circle of events, but revolve solely round the illustration of his wonderful career. Although in the last resort derived from various sources, some older and some more recent, they constitute in every respect an unmistakable unity, and must have been recorded in a special work before they were incorporated in the Book of Kings. They all possess a certain resemblance in so far as they bring into prominence only the recollections of Elisha's miracles. The province of religion is naturally always the province of miracles also, because it is that of pure and strong faith in the presence and operation of heavenly forces in human action as well as in human experience; where, therefore, true religion makes the most powerful efforts, there will be a corresponding display of miracles which will either actually take place through the activity of the believing spirit, or will be at any rate experienced by the believing heart; while to be powerfully moved, though only from a distance, by the might of such forces is in itself a gain. Thus far the age of Elijah and Elisha, when the true religion was obliged to maintain itself with the utmost force against its internal enemies, was as rich in miracles as the days of Moses and Joshua or the conclusion of the period of the Judges had been; only these miracles do not now, as in the time of Moses and Joshua, affect the whole nation, nor, as in the era of the last Judges, are they directed against a foreign people, but they proceed from a few individual prophets who are compelled as instruments of the ancient religion to exert all the greater power, as in the nation itself the true faith threatens to disappear. No such stories can be anything more than scattered traces of the action of a spirit in itself miraculous,

and of the impression immediately produced by it; but that there is some spirit of power in religion to the agency of which they all point is only the more certain.

But this very element in the contents of such narratives, especially in Elisha's case, has happily contributed to preserve other recollections which are not chiefly, still less solely, concerned with this peculiarity (cf. 2 Kings iii. 9). And further, it is by no means to be overlooked that such recollections of the miraculous activity of such a spirit would, from the very first, be conceived in various ways by various dispositions; and in the course of time would assume very different forms. All the evidence points to the conclusion that the collection which was incorporated in the Book of Kings was not composed in its earlier shape till about one hundred years after Elisha, when there were no longer any of his disciples alive, and the whole memory of his miraculous career threatened to disappear.

i. The Waters Healed.

Two miracles, one of mercy and one of judgment, marked Elisha's establishment as Elijah's successor. The former, Elisha's first public act, seems typical of his whole ministry. All the natural charms of Jericho, one of the fairest sites in the East, were spoilt by the unsatisfactory character of the water. The water was "naught," and the ground was barren because of it. Calling for a new cruse and a supply of salt, Elisha led the way to the spring whence the waters issued, and, casting in the salt as the symbol of purification and preservation, declared that God had "healed" the waters. A spring called "Ain es Sultan" is still pointed out as the one in question, and as it is the only spring of any importance in the neighbourhood of Jericho, the tradition may be accepted.

A bitter barren-making stream,
  The tears that flowed for sin,
Till the great Prophet came, and cast
  Salt from the new cruse in.

Yet staunched he not the waters so—
  That they should flow no more:
He healed their springs, then bid them run
  As freely as before:

He healed their source, and well has proved
His word not given in vain,
That now they never should bring death
Nor barrenness again.[1]

ii. The Judgment of Irreverence.

The faith of the men of Jericho in asking for this miracle stands in contrast with the insolence and irreverence shown by a number of "young lads" (R.V. marg.) who mocked the prophet as he entered Bethel: "Go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." This incident seems at first sight an exception to Elisha's whole career, and contrary to the spirit of the Bible. But it should be remembered that Bethel was the great seat of idolatry, and this "curse" was not mere personal indignation, but a revelation of the Divine wrath against the apostasy of the place, which was no doubt the real cause of the attack on a prophet of Jehovah. It is also well to bear in mind that the narrative before us is exceedingly brief, and wanting in details which might relieve the difficulty and modify the apparent disproportion between the wrong done and the penalty inflicted. In its present form it reads like a folklore tale, of the kind familiar in all lands, intended for the admonition of rude and naughty children.

¶ As the Church has its rites and mysteries and its true freedom, and Angels watch their observance, so Satan has his rites and his false freedom, and his evil spirits watching to entice children to them. We see their influence in sullenness, in want of courtesy, in disrespect, in irreverence, till they are destroyed, like the children of Bethel by Elisha. But as he passed from their doom to intercede for them on Carmel, so our Christ and His saints are ever interceding for us. The dews fall from Heaven upon our children, and we see their effect in bright greetings and smiles and obeisance; the graver training the more light-hearted to do reverence, as the Angels train us.[2]

¶ Seven years old Geneviève was, then, when on his way to England from Auxerre, St. Germain passed a night in her village of Nanterre, and among the children who brought him on his way in the morning in more kindly manner than Elisha's convoy, noticed this one—wider-eyed in reverence than the rest; drew

[1] R. C. Trench, *Poems*, 97. [2] Keble, *Lyra Innocentium*, 127.

her to him, questioned her, and was sweetly answered, that she would fain be Christ's handmaid. And he hung round her neck a small copper coin, marked with the cross. Thenceforward Geneviève held herself as "separated from the world."[1]

iii. The Army Saved.

1. After this, Elisha returned to the solitude of Mount Carmel. But, before long, he was called back to public action, and was enabled to prove himself in very deed, as Elijah had been, "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof"; for God used him to save three kings and their armies from a lingering death through thirst. Jehoram of Israel, Jehoshaphat of Judah, and the king of Edom had united in a campaign against the Moabites and their king Mesha, who had thrown off their allegiance to Israel, and refused to pay the annual tribute of the wool of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams. Jehoram was the brother of the late king Ahaziah. He had abjured the Baal-worship, destroying the idol his father had made, but, like all the kings of Israel, he continued the idolatries of Jeroboam.

The allied armies found themselves in difficulties after a circuitous march of seven days: there was no water to be found in the wilderness. At Jehoshaphat's suggestion Elisha, who was with the armies, was summoned. At first he only bade Jehoram betake himself to the prophets of his father and his mother, but then, in deference to the piety of the king of Judah, he consented to seek a Divine answer. When a minstrel played before him and the hand of Jehovah was upon him, he commanded that deep trenches be dug, and prophesied that, though they should see no rain, the valley would yet be filled with water. His orders were obeyed, and next morning, owing to a plentiful fall of rain high among the mountains of Moab, the streams poured down, and all the country was filled with water.

¶ This incident throws light both upon the general accuracy of the ancient narrative, and upon the fact that events to which a directly supernatural colouring is given are, in many instances, not so much supernatural as providential. The deliverance of Israel was due, not to a portent wrought by Elisha, but to the pure wisdom which he derived from the inspiration of God. When the counsels of princes were of none effect, and for lack

[1] Ruskin, *The Bible of Amiens*, chap. ii. § 5 (*Works*, xxxiii. 56).

of the spirit of counsel the people were perishing, his mind alone, illuminated by a wisdom from on high, saw what was the right step to take. He bade the soldiers dig trenches in the dry torrent bed—which was the very step most likely to ensure their deliverance from the torment of thirst, and which would be done under similar circumstances to this day. They saw neither wind nor rain; but there had been a storm among the farther hills (according to the tradition of Josephus, rain had fallen at three days' distance on the hills of Edom) and the swollen water-courses discharged their overflow into the trenches of the wady which were ready prepared for them, and offered the path of least resistance.[1]

¶ Man will never become a materialist so long as his harp and his viol are left to him. He can never deny his relation to a spiritual world while so ethereal a thing as music is here to keep him company. Music is so plainly of two worlds, a mediator between them. It touches matter; it touches spirit, and each vibrates to the contact. Note the two things and their relation here. On the one side you have the collection of sounds, the product of vibrations in the air; sounds, with their marvellous harmonic relations, their connexion with number, with mathematics, with the qualities of metals and strings; all this for the material side. But there is the other; that of the soul's response. How has this come about? How is it that you have this common language, appealing at once to the universal heart; that leaps across all the tongues, all the dialects with which the human family has confused itself, and tells its own story to every listening soul? Why is it that these vibrations, movements of the impalpable air, breaking on the tympanum, on a nerve, stir in us all that is exalted, mystical, religious? We talk to-day of ministering angels as though that were some legend of old. In music we have an angel, not shaped for us in bodily form, but something beyond ourselves, that waits on our spirit, that whispers our relationship to a harmony that is behind and beyond all ages and all worlds.[2]

2. Another strange result followed: the crimson light of the dawn reflected on the new-made watercourses was mistaken by the Moabites for blood. Imagining that the allied armies had turned their swords against each other, they rushed heedlessly to their own ruin. Not only did the allies drive the Moabites before them; they deliberately destroyed the country, casting stones on

[1] F. W. Farrar.

[2] J. Brierley, *The Life of the Soul*, 190.

all the good ground, filling up the wells, cutting down the trees, and leaving only Kir-hareseth with its fortifications undestroyed. Jehoram's victory seemed complete. But there was to be no glory or triumph for Israel. The sequel to the story is not quite clear. The king of Moab, having failed in a desperate attempt to break through to Edom, took his eldest son, the heir to the throne, and offered him up as a burnt-offering to Moloch. And the last words of the inspired record are these: "And there was great wrath against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land." Now, the Moabite Stone, while silent about previous reverses, records the great triumph of Mesha, king of Moab, in driving back the invading army. The Scripture certainly admits the explanation that, roused to fury by their king's action, the Moabites rallied to another onslaught, and drove the invaders out of their land.

¶ In the Moabite Stone (ll. 1–8) Mesha tells us that, in the reign of his father, Chemoshmelek (?) of Dibon, Chemosh was angry with Moab, and Omri and his son oppressed Moab, subjected and occupied it forty years. This brings us to the point at which Kings first refers to Moab. 2 Kings i. 1, iii. 4, 5 states that Mesha king of Moab was rich in sheep, and paid to Israel a tribute (? annual) of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams (A.V.), or their wool (R.V.); and that when Ahab died he rebelled against the king of Israel. According to Mesha (l. 8), the revolt took place in the middle of Ahab's reign. Probably the war of Israel with Syria, which cost Ahab his life, afforded the opportunity for the revolt of Moab. It is not clear how we are to combine the inscription and 2 Kings iii. We may suppose that Mesha's victories took place at the time of the revolt, before the events of 2 Kings iii.; or that, at first, Moab simply asserted its independence, and that Mesha's conquests were made after the retreat of Jehoram; or that the inscription is a comprehensive account of Mesha's achievements both before and after Jehoram's campaign, his reverses being ignored, just as Kings makes no mention of the loss of Israelite cities to Moab. In 2 Kings iii. we read that Jehoram, at the head of a general muster of Israel, and with Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom as allies, marched round the southern end of the Dead Sea, a route which suggests that Israel was very weak on the east of the Jordan; that the Moabites fell into an ambush, and were defeated; that the allies captured and destroyed the cities and laid waste the land, and at last shut up Mesha in Kir-hareseth. After an unsuccessful sortie, Mesha "took his eldest son . . . and offered

him for a burnt-offering upon the wall. And there was great wrath against (R.V.) *or* upon (R.V.m.), Israel; and they departed from thence and returned to their own land." Possibly the Israelite account disguises a defeat as a voluntary withdrawal; but the prophets' accounts of the superstition of their fellow-countrymen show that they may have been afraid to press the siege after what they believed to be an irresistible appeal to Chemosh. But the retreat was a disastrous blow to the prestige of Israel.[1]

iv. The Widow's Oil.

Many of Elisha's miracles seem to have no special purpose, either doctrinal or otherwise, but simply the relief of trivial and transient distresses. From the awful scenes of blood and carnage we pass to a humble home in Israel. The widow of one of the sons of the prophets—the name and place are wanting—was in debt, and her sons were about to be taken away by her creditor and sold as slaves. In her difficulty she appealed to Elisha as the recognized head of the prophetic guild. On Elisha's inquiry she acknowledged that she had nothing left but a small quantity of a coarse kind of oil which was used for anointing the body after a bath. That was enough in the prophet's hands to test and evidence faith. She was commanded to borrow from her neighbours all the vessels she could, to retire into the privacy of her house for an act of faith, and there pour out from the pot of oil into the borrowed vessels. As she did so the oil multiplied until she had filled every vessel she could lay hands on. Determined to do nothing without the direct command of Elisha, she came to him with the glad tidings of what had happened, and was now told to sell the oil, pay her debt, and herself and her sons to live off the balance.

The widow's necessity was, to the great Elisha, not the plea of charity, but the demand of justice. If in the circumstances the prophet had not given heed to the appeal of the widow, it would have implied either that he was not the living medium between God and His people which he professed to be, or that Jehovah was not the living and the true God in the sense in which Elisha had preached Him. With reverence be it said, the appeal to the prophet could no more have remained unanswered than a cry for help addressed to Christ in the days of His flesh.

[1] W. H. Bennett, in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, iii. 411.

¶ Help, in clerical garments or in the garb of a layman, is one of those perennially blessed people whom men instinctively trust. There is a healthy sense of efficiency about them and a broad human nature. David Scott is happy in his picture of Help the Athlete. He is the natural successor to the Herakles of Euripides whom Browning transcribes so wonderfully in *Balaustion's Adventure*, and to Shakespeare's Henry v. on the night before Agincourt. He is the kind of man that Charles Kingsley was, whose "nearest work" is that of helping "lame dogs over stiles." He is the type that Jerome describes for modern days in his chapter on "Evergreens" in *Idle Thoughts*, and Mrs. Browning in her *My Kate*. And indeed Help is often a woman, and among all woman's new ideals of to-day there is none that will ever fulfil her nature so perfectly as the oldest of all—the helpmeet. Help is an office which conventional piety may sometimes count secular. Yet what is called spirituality is to a certain extent a matter of temperament, and those who have a special aptitude for helping need ask for no higher office. Paul has included "helps" among the great functions of Christian ministry, and the beautiful legend of Christoferus has proclaimed the essential Christianity of such service. Ruskin has said finely: "There is no true potency, remember, but that of help, nor true ambition but the ambition to save." [1]

v. The Shunammite.

1. The charmingly-told Shunem incident reveals further friendliness and homely interests. Elisha, in his journeys to and fro among the schools of the prophets, had often enjoyed the welcome hospitality eagerly pressed upon him by the lady of Shunem. Struck with his sacred character, she persuaded her husband to take a step unusual even to the boundless hospitality of the East. She begged him to do honour to this holy man of God by building for him a little chamber on the flat roof of the house, to which he might have easy and private access by the outside staircase. Her husband was willing, and so the prophet's chamber was soon ready; and it became Elisha's home whenever he passed through the town.

2. Elisha was anxious to do something for her to show his appreciation of her kindness; and, as his services in connexion with the expedition against Moab had brought him into favour at

[1] John Kelman, *The Road*, i. 24.

court, he offered to speak for her to the king, or the captain of the host. She replied with the greatest dignity, "I dwell among mine own people." She had no need of earthly honours; she was enjoying to the full the purest satisfaction which comes from duty faithfully discharged and love fully requited. Gehazi, the prophet's servant, unscrupulous as he afterwards appears, but a keen observer, suggested that her only need was a child, for she had none. A son was promised her, and, like Isaac and John the Baptist, was born beyond all human probability.

3. But the gift of God was apparently to be taken from her. After some years—the narrative goes on without a break—the child going with his father into the harvest fields was attacked by sunstroke, and died on his mother's knees. With the quiet dignity of faith she rode with one servant to Elisha at Carmel, and in her great earnestness took hold of the prophet by the feet. Gehazi started to thrust her away, but Elisha saw that the woman was in great trouble, and he said to the servant, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." Then the woman said, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" Elisha guessed the truth, and at once sent Gehazi to hasten on and lay his staff upon the face of the child. But the broken-hearted mother refused to leave Elisha. She imagined that the servant and the staff might be severed from Elisha; but she knew that wherever the prophet was, there was power. So Elisha arose and followed her, and on the way Gehazi met them with the news that the child lay still and dead, with the fruitless staff upon his face.

The reason for this failure is not quite clear. It may have lain in the want of faith in the woman, or in the character of Gehazi, or more probably in a mistake on Elisha's part in supposing that he could communicate the power of the Spirit of God in this way.

On coming to the house, Elisha found the body of the child upon the bed. After earnest prayer he outstretched himself over the little corpse, as Elijah had done at Zarephath. Soon it began to grow warm with returning life, and Elisha, after pacing up and down the room, once more stretched himself over him. Then the child opened his eyes and sneezed seven times, and Elisha called

to Gehazi to summon the mother. "Take up thy son," he said. She prostrated herself at his feet in speechless gratitude, then took up her recovered child and went.

¶ We see in the Shunammite a true and faithful Israelitish woman, who, in a time of general apostasy, owned Jehovah alike in her life and her home. Receiving a prophet, because of Him who had sent him, because he was a holy man of God—and with humility and entire self-forgetfulness—she received a prophet's reward in the gift most precious to a Jewish mother, which she had not dared to hope for, even when announced to her. Then, when severely tried, she still held fast to her trust in the promise — strong even when weakest — once more self-forgetful, and following deepest spiritual impulse. And, in the end, her faith appears victorious—crowned by Divine mercy, and shining out the more brightly from its contrast to the felt weakness of the prophet. As we think of this, it seems as if a fuller light were shed on the history of the trials of an Abraham, an Isaac, or a Jacob; on the inner life of those heroes of faith to whom the Epistle of the Hebrews points us for example and learning (Heb. xi.), and on such Scripture sayings as these: "Jehovah killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up" (1 Sam. ii. 6); "Know that Jehovah hath set apart him that is godly for himself; Jehovah will hear when I call unto him" (Ps. iv. 3); or this: "All the paths of Jehovah are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies" (Ps. xxv. 10). The story speaks to us of Him through whom "death is swallowed up in victory." As we think of Him who, as God Incarnate, and as the Sent of the Father, is to us the Representative and the Prophet of God in a unique sense, we recall that it was not, as by Elijah or Elisha, through prayer and personal contact, but by the Word of His power that He raised the dead (Mark v. 39–42; Luke vi. 13–15; John xi. 43, 44). And beyond this we remember that "the hour . . . now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live"; and that "whosoever liveth and believeth" in Christ "shall never die" (John v. 25, xi. 26).[1]

vi. Death in the Pot.

Elisha's next miracle according to the Scripture narrative does not immediately follow the preceding in order of time, but probably took place during the seven years' famine, of which we have an account in a later chapter.

[1] A. Edersheim.

The sons of the prophets were seated round him, listening to his instructions; the hour came for their simple meal, and he ordered the great pot to be put on the fire for the vegetable soup on which, with bread, they chiefly lived. One of them went out for herbs, and carelessly brought his outer garment (the *abeyah*) full of wild poisonous colocynths, which, by ignorance or inadvertence, were shred into the pottage. But when it was cooked and poured out they perceived the poisonous taste, and cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." "Bring meal," answered the wonder-worker, and forthwith the dish was rendered harmless and wholesome—not because of the meal, but because of the power of Jehovah working through His servant.

¶ There are many species of the Gourd family wild in Palestine. We found *Cucumis prophetarum*, the Globe Cucumber; *Citrullus colocynthus*, the Colocynth; and *Ecbalium elaterium*, the Squirting Cucumber. I conceive that, though the Squirting Cucumber will answer the requirements of the text (2 Kings iv. 39), yet that the Colocynth is undoubtedly the plant in question. The Squirting Cucumber is not so bitter, nor does it bear the same resemblance to the good fruit. Besides, it is common over the whole country, and ought to have been well known to the prophet's servant. Now Elisha, we read, had just come down to Gilgal, between Jericho and the Dead Sea, and doubtless the gatherer of the pottage would be his attendant who had accompanied him from the upper country. The Colocynth grows abundantly on the barren sands near Gilgal, and all round the Dead Sea on the low flats, covering much ground with its tendrils, which reach a prodigious length, and bearing great quantities of fruit. We never saw the Colocynth elsewhere. Indeed, it is exclusively a plant of the dry and barren sandy deserts; or growing on volcanic sand, as at Pantellaria. An inhabitant of the upper country could not, therefore, be expected to recognize it, but would be attracted at once by the beautiful appearance of the fruit, and gather it eagerly for the Wild Melon, or Pumpkin.[1]

vii. Miraculous Feeding.

Closely connected with this is the next event recorded. If the former showed how easily God could remove from the provision of His people that which was hurtful by the addition of that which in itself is nutritious and wholesome, the next event

[1] H. B. Tristram, *The Natural History of the Bible*, 451.

affords another instance of how readily He can send unexpected provision to supply the wants of His servants. A man of Baal-shalishah brought to Elisha, as the prophet of Jehovah, an offering of the first-fruits of his land. This is the only mention of Baal-shalishah, but it was probably near Gilgal, in "the land of Shalishah," where Saul had searched for the lost asses. The offering consisted of twenty barley loaves, the food of the common people, and a sack or wallet full of "fresh ears of corn." Elisha told his servant—perhaps Gehazi—to set them before the people present. "What," he asked, "should I set this before an hundred men?" But Elisha told him in the Lord's name that it would more than suffice; and so it did.

¶ Although this narrative is generally, and in a sense correctly, regarded as prefiguring the miraculous multiplication of the scanty provision with which our Lord fed the multitude (Matt. xiv. 19–21; John vi. 9–13), yet the text does not here indicate any such miraculous increase of the food. But it does most emphatically indicate that Elisha was truly the prophet and servant of Jehovah; that his trust in his God was absolute and unwavering; and that, true to His promise, the Lord will always provide for His servants who look up unto Him.[1]

¶ Was this not the foreshadowing of a far grander miracle, done by the power of the great Anti-type, Christ Jesus? Can we not see the five thousand men sitting in rows on the green grass? Can we not hear the voice of the Master, uttering the very same words as Elisha, "Give ye them to eat"? "And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full." Yet how far more wonderful was the later miracle! Only one hundred men were fed by Elisha, five thousand by Christ; one loaf supplied the needs of five men at Gilgal, one loaf was sufficient for one thousand at Bethsaida. Only a little was left at Elisha's feast; twelve baskets full were collected by the apostles after the supper on the grass. Yet, still, Elisha's miracle was a shadow, a picture, nay more, a foretaste, of grand and glorious things to come.[2]

viii. Naaman.

1. The best-known miracle of Elisha, the story of which has become a classic, was the healing of the leprosy of Naaman, the "captain of the host" of the king of Syria. The fame of the prophet

[1] A. Edersheim, *The History of Israel and Judah*, vi. 145. [2] O. F. Walton.

had been brought to the Syrian court by a little Israelite maid—the servant of Naaman's wife—who had been carried captive by the Syrians in one of their marauding excursions into Israelite territory. The king despatched Naaman, who was a great favourite with him, with a present of "ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment," to the court of Samaria, requesting that he might be cured. The king of Israel himself was neither physician nor prophet; and he saw, or chose to see, in the despatch of the Syrian monarch only one of those impossible demands with which ambitious monarchs are wont to preface a declaration of war. But Naaman's arrival and message were reported to Elisha. With the freedom and authority of his great position, he rebuked Jehoram for his unbelief and his alarm. Why could not Naaman be sent on to him that he might learn that there was a prophet in Israel? Naaman obeyed. The great Syrian left the palace of the monarch, and drew up, with his long line of horsemen and his splendid war-chariot, before the humble dwelling of Elisha. He waited, expecting that the prophet, who had invited him, would at once appear. But the servant of the King of kings was not exultantly impressed, as false prophets so often are, by earthly greatness. Elisha did not even pay him the compliment of coming out of the house to meet him. He simply sent out his servant to the Syrian commander-in-chief with the brief message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

2. We may at once say that the conduct of Elisha was not prompted by fear of defilement by leprosy, or by a desire to mark more clearly the miracle about to be performed, least of all by spiritual pride. The spiritual pride of a Jew would have found other expression, and, in general, those who cherish spiritual pride are scarcely proof against such visits as this of Naaman. We cannot doubt that the bearing of Elisha was Divinely directed. Naaman was a proud man. He had been accustomed, at the brilliant court of Damascus, to receive a great deal of deference and consideration—more perhaps than any one, except the monarch himself. Naaman wished to be treated like a great man that happened to be a leper; Elisha treated him like a leper that

happened to be a great man. Naaman's pride and confidence in his wealth and high standing must be broken. He must learn that God's true servant is not overawed by earthly greatness. He must realize that in God's sight he is only a leper not fit to be touched. And the means used for his recovery must lift his faith up to God. It had been rudely detached from the king, and was resting upon the prophet; it must be shifted from the prophet to the living God. Elisha wished to efface himself completely, and to fix the leper's thoughts on the one truth that, if healing was granted to him, it was due to the gift of God, not to the thaumaturgy or arts of man.

¶ No doubt, as a rule, people are ready to repose wonderful faith in the doctor. It is striking to see how implicitly an invalid will accept a doctor's diagnosis of his disease, and drink the drugs, whatever they be, which he prescribes as a remedy. Sometimes, however, before sending for a doctor, an invalid has made up his mind as to what the disease is, and as to what medicines should be employed. If, when the doctor comes, he pronounces it a different disease, and prescribes a different remedy, the invalid is disappointed and displeased. In all probability he will dismiss the doctor, simply because, whether right or wrong, he has ventured to contradict his own preconceived notion. This is literally a modern repetition of the case of Naaman.[1]

3. In great indignation Naaman turned and left the city. It was well that the relation between himself and his servants was so simple and affectionate ("my father") that they could address him in terms of respectful expostulation, and so turn him from his rash purpose. They pleaded that, as he would have been ready to do any great or difficult thing that the prophet commanded, he might at least try so simple a remedy. So it came to pass that instead of returning "in a rage" to Damascus a leper, Naaman went down to Jordan. And as "according to the saying of the man of God," he "dipped himself seven times in Jordan," "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."

4. Then it was that, in his gratitude and his joy, Naaman paid his second visit to Elisha. He was immediately admitted

[1] W. L. Riach.

to the presence of the prophet, whom he met with the confession, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." That was the lesson which Elisha desired to teach him, and this acknowledgment of Naaman's is the prophet's best reward. Naaman was eager to make some rich return to the prophet; but here again he was astonished at the difference between Elisha and the priests or soothsayers, with whose greed for gain he was doubtless well acquainted. Elisha refused to take any reward or payment. He felt that it was a good opportunity to show to the Syrians that the God of all the earth was a God of love, and that His prophet was unselfish. He was anxious that Naaman should carry to Syria the loftiest possible conception of the God of Israel. It was of the utmost importance to show that, as the prophet of God did not work miracles in his own power, or by his own will, so he did it not for reward, and that the gift of God could not be purchased with money. It was essential that Naaman and the Syrians should not look upon him as upon some vulgar sorcerer who wrought wonders for "the rewards of divination." Indeed, we can scarcely exaggerate the impression which the refusal of Elisha must have made both upon the followers of Naaman and generally in Israel. To put an end to all importunity, in refusing the present, he appealed to Jehovah with his usual solemn formula—"As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none."

5. Naaman, made to feel by Elisha's self-denial that the glory was due to Elisha's God, resolved to become a worshipper of Jehovah. He asked permission to take earth from Israel, that he might erect an altar to the God of Israel, his idea being the popular one, that Jehovah was a local deity, and could be worshipped only on His own soil. Elisha did not seek to correct his mistake. He even gave the proselyte permission to continue to pay outward homage to Rimmon, the god worshipped by the king of Syria. He practically allowed Naaman to give the sign of outward compliance with idolatry, by saying to him, "Go in peace." The position of Naaman was wholly different from that of any Israelite. He was only the convert, or the half convert, of a day, and though he acknowledged the supremacy of Jehovah as alone worthy of his worship, he probably shared in the belief—

common even in Israel—that there were other gods, local gods, gods of the nations, to whom Jehovah might have divided the limits of their power. To demand of one who, like Naaman, had been an idolater all his days, the sudden abandonment of every custom and tradition of his life, would have been to demand from him an unreasonable, and, in his circumstances, useless and all but impossible self-sacrifice. The best way was to let him feel and see for himself the futility of Rimmon-worship. If he were not frightened back from his sudden faith in Jehovah, the scruple of conscience which he already felt in making his request might naturally grow within him and lead him to all that was best and highest. The temporary condonation of an imperfection might be a wise step towards the ultimate realization of a truth. We cannot at all blame Elisha, if, with such knowledge as he then possessed, he took a mercifully tolerant view of the exigencies of Naaman's position. He will not quench the smoking flax. Naaman was still very ignorant. He knew very little yet of the holy God of Israel. But Elisha knew that the God who had begun a good work in him would perfect it.

6. A characteristic Oriental incident closes the story. Naaman having departed in peace, Elisha's servant Gehazi followed him, and by dint of lying obtained the treasure which Elisha refused. But Elisha divined his dishonesty and doomed him and his house to be afflicted with the leprosy of Naaman for ever. His punishment was severe; but his sin was great. The leprosy was a fitting punishment, both because it had been Naaman's, from which obedient reliance on God had set him free, and because of its symbolical meaning, as the type of sin.

One sin leads, as if by a fatal necessity, to another. When he started upon the sinful step, Gehazi had only one object in view, to secure by any means, fair or foul, a portion of the coveted treasure. It is probable that falsehood did not enter into his programme. But, as he proceeded, a lie became necessary. And then, at a later stage, an additional lie was required. Yes, and this warns us of the danger of beginning a sinful course, for we cannot tell what may be the result. The ancient Romans were in the way of expressing a warning in these two words, *Obsta principiis*, which mean, "Resist beginnings." The wisdom

of such a warning is not only seen in this, that the same sin is so apt to grow from less to more, but in this, that one sin is so likely to lead to another sin of a different description. Our duty, therefore, is to keep the heart with all diligence, since out of it are the issues of life.[1]

ix. The Lost Axe-head.

The striking story of Elisha and Naaman, and of the fall and punishment of Gehazi, is followed by an anecdote of the prophet's life which appears to rise but little above the ecclesiastical portents related in mediæval hagiologies.

The sons of the prophets, who were increasing in numbers, resolved to build a larger dwelling-place by the Jordan. While they were engaged in felling trees, the head of a borrowed axe flew off and fell into the water. It would be vain to search for it in the deep and turbid river. But a cry brought the man of God to the spot. He broke off a stick and cast it into the stream, and forthwith the iron came to the surface, and was restored to its possessor.

This miracle is so contrary to our ideas, and so out of proportion to the loss incurred, that attempts have been made to find a simpler explanation of it. But it seems clear that the writer of the Book of Kings understood the incident as of a miraculous nature, otherwise it would not have had a place among the "wonders" which Elisha did.

¶ Some of the Rabbis and certain modern interpreters have argued, either that the stick which had been cut off struck right into the hole of the axe-head and so brought it up, or else that the stick thrust under the axe had rendered it possible to drag it to land. But, to speak plainly, both these suggestions involve such manifest impossibilities as hardly to require serious discussion. It is scarcely necessary to add that every such explanation is opposed equally to the wording and to the spirit of the sacred text, which assuredly would not have recorded among the marvellous doings of the heaven-sent prophet a device, which, if it had been possible, could have been accomplished by any clever-handed person. There cannot be any doubt in the mind of every impartial man that Scripture here intends to record a notable miracle. On the other hand, there is nothing in the sacred text

[1] W. L. Riach.

which obliges us to believe that the iron "did swim." In fact, the Hebrew word is never used in that sense. The impression left on our minds is that the iron which had sunk to the bottom was set in motion, made to float, probably, by some sudden rush of water. Beyond this we cannot go in our attempts to explain the manner in which this miraculous result may have been brought about.[1]

¶ It is a well-known fact, that, owing to the strong specific gravity of its waters, things will float in the Dead Sea that will not float elsewhere. I do not know whether iron is one of these things; but at all events something like iron may have been seen to float in these waters that would have sunk in others. That would be at once regarded as a miracle, and would easily give rise to such a story.[2]

[1] A. Edersheim, *The History of Israel and Judah*, vi. 164.
[2] W. Sanday, *Bishop Gore's Challenge to Criticism* (1914), 26.

ELISHA.

III.

The Politician.

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The Politician.

Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.—2 Kings vi. 12.

Elisha's life and ministry were very closely linked with the political and military history of his country. However much he disliked the idolatrous practices of her kings, he had still hope for his country, and was ready to help her. He intervened, therefore, not once or twice only, to save the king and his soldiers.

I.

Dothan.

1. The Syrians, at this later period, seem to have carried on the war by a system of predatory incursions into the territory of Israel; and on several occasions Elisha warned King Jehoram of the place which the Syrians intended to surround, and, by thus putting him on his guard, enabled him to escape, or at any rate to defeat the measures of the enemy. The Syrian king, bewildered by his ill-success, at first suspected treachery, and then, learning of Elisha's clairvoyance, sent an army to seize the prophet in Dothan.

2. The sequel was remarkable. A servant of the prophet first discovered the enemy, in the early morning; and, greatly alarmed, he informed his master of what appeared to him a hopeless situation. But Elisha was undisturbed. His mind was stayed on God. "Fear not," he said; "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." He then prayed for his dismayed follower, and the man had a vision of forces, hitherto unseen by him, that guard and help the servants of God. The literal story runs: "And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he

saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Our eyes are blinded and we need to have them cleared, if not in the same manner as this lad's, yet in an analogous way. We look so constantly at the things seen that we have no sight for the unseen. Worldliness, sin, unbelief, sense and its trifles, time and its transitoriness, blind the eyes of our mind; and we need those of sense to be closed that these may open. The truest vision is the vision of faith. It is certain, direct, and conclusive. The world says, "Seeing is believing"; the gospel says, "Believing is seeing." If we would but live near to Jesus Christ, pray to Him to touch our blind eyeballs, and turn away from the dazzling unrealities which sense brings, we should find Him the "master-light of all our seeing," and be sure of the eternal, invisible things, with an assurance superior to that given by the keenest sight in the brightest sunshine. When we are blind to earth, we see earth glorified by angel presences, and fear and despair and helplessness and sorrow flee away from our tranquil hearts. If, on the other hand, we fix our gaze on earth and its trifles, there will generally be more to alarm than to encourage, and we shall do well to be afraid, if we do not see, as in such a case we shall certainly not see, the fiery wall around us, behind which God keeps His people safe.

Almighty God, as now we raise
  Our longing eyes in hope to Thee,
Anointed, may our wond'ring gaze
  Thy chariots and Thy horsemen see.

Let faith revive, let courage new
  The vision of Thy hosts impart;
That all Thou willest we may do
  With steadfast hands and holy heart.[1]

3. There is a touch of almost joyful humour in the way in which Elisha proceeded to use, in the present emergency, the power of Divine deliverance. Some think that he went out of the town and came himself to the Syrian captains; but what we read is simply that "when they came down to him," he prayed God to send them "illusion," so that they might be misled. Then he

[1] A. S. Dyer, in *The Ideal Christian Home*, 190.

boldly said to them, "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek." Elisha led the Syrians in their delusion straight into the city of Samaria, where they suddenly found themselves at the mercy of the king and his troops.

4. With an eagerness and a spiritual dulness characteristic of him, Jehoram would fain have slaughtered these captives of the Lord. And, with an equally characteristic uprightness and large-hearted generosity, the prophet almost indignantly rebuked the spurious zeal and courage of the king: "Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?" It would have been unmanly to act otherwise; Jehovah had not brought these blinded men as His own captives to give the king of Israel an easy and a cruel triumph; the whole moral purpose of this event, its very character, would have been changed, if the proposal of Jehoram had been carried out. And it was right royal treatment on the part of the Heavenly Conqueror's ambassador, when, at his bidding, they gave them a great meal, and then dismissed them to their master, to report how Jehovah made captives of the captors of His representative, and how he entertained and released His captives. It was a signal victory for Elisha; and the calm faith he manifested when apparently in great peril makes the story of Dothan one of the most helpful and inspiring in his whole career.

¶ In the hollow where the Boer tents had stood, amid the laagered wagons of the vanquished, under a murky sky and a constant drizzle of rain, the victors spent the night. Sleep was out of the question, for all night the fatigue parties were searching the hillside and the wounded were being carried in. Camp-fires were lit and soldiers and prisoners crowded round them, and it is pleasant to recall that the warmest corner and the best of their rude fare were always reserved for the downcast Dutchmen, while words of rude praise and sympathy softened the pain of defeat. It is the memory of such things which may in happier days be more potent than all the wisdom of statesmen in welding our two races into one.[1]

¶ It was six o'clock in the morning when General Pretyman rode up to Lord Roberts' headquarters. Behind him upon a

[1] A. Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, 105.

white horse was a dark-bearded man, with the quick restless eye of the hunter, middle-sized, thickly built, with grizzled hair flowing from under a tall brown felt hat. He wore the black broad-cloth of the burgher with a green summer overcoat, and carried a small whip in his hands. His appearance was that of a respectable London vestryman rather than of a most redoubtable soldier with a particularly sinister career behind him.

The Generals shook hands, and it was briefly intimated to Cronje that his surrender must be unconditional, to which, after a short silence, he agreed. His only stipulations were personal, that his wife, his grandson, his secretary, his adjutant, and his servant might accompany him. The same evening he was despatched to Cape Town, receiving those honourable attentions which were due to his valour rather than to his character. His men, a pallid ragged crew, emerged from their holes and burrows, and delivered up their rifles. It is pleasant to add that, with much in their memories to exasperate them, the British privates treated their enemies with as large-hearted a courtesy as Lord Roberts had shown to their leader. Our total capture numbered some three thousand of the Transvaal and eleven hundred of the Free State. That the latter were not far more numerous was due to the fact that many had already shredded off to their farms. Besides Cronje, Wolverans of the Transvaal, and the German artillerist Albrecht, with forty-four other field-cornets and commandants, fell into our hands. Six small guns were also secured. The same afternoon saw the long column of the prisoners on its way to Modder River, there to be entrained for Cape Town, the most singular lot of people to be seen at that moment upon earth—ragged, patched, grotesque, some with goloshes, some with umbrellas, coffee-pots, and Bibles, their favourite baggage. So they passed out of their ten days of glorious history.[1]

¶ Mr. Gladstone's intellectual generosity was a part of the same largeness of nature. He cordially acknowledged his indebtedness to those who helped him in any piece of work, received their suggestions candidly, even when opposed to his own preconceived notions, did not hesitate to confess a mistake. Those who know the abundance of their resources, and have conquered fame, can doubtless afford to be generous. Julius Cæsar was, and George Washington, and so, in a different sphere, were Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin. But the instances to the contrary are so numerous that one may say of magnanimity that it is among the rarest as well as the finest ornaments of character.[2]

[1] A. Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, 344.

[2] J. Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography*, 457.

II.

Famine in Samaria.

The next incident, though introduced without remark immediately after the last, evidently occurred at a different time. The king of Syria gathered a great army to besiege Samaria. Elisha encouraged the men of Israel to defend their city to the last. The wonderfully vivid narrative tells a pitiful tale of women boiling their children, of unclean food worth more than its weight in silver, of a king worked up to a pitch of frenzy and murderous designs, and renouncing his allegiance to Jehovah. Such faith as he had was strained to the breaking point. In despair, he turned his fury upon the prophet who, he thought, had power which he would not use, and sent to apprehend him. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, the king apparently followed his own messenger, and confessed that the calamity was Divinely inflicted, and that he must surrender the city: "Behold this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Then at this crisis of fate, Elisha spoke. The message was confident: "Hear ye the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord, To-morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." One of the lords in close attendance on the king derided the prophet. Only if windows were made in heaven might such a thing be. "Behold," was the only response, "thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof."

During the night there was a panic in the Syrian host, the camp was deserted and every part of the prophecy fulfilled. The very courtier who had mocked Elisha was appointed to guard the city gate, and was trodden to death by the uncontrollable rush of the hungry populace.

The unbelieving lord has not only his predecessors, but, alas! he has also his followers, crowds and crowds of faithless souls who follow in his footsteps. Some of them are like himself, utterly unbelieving. They believe neither in God nor in His power. They utterly deny the use of prayer. They sneer at the true believer. They turn into ridicule every attempt to acknowledge God in His dealings with man. We have all heard of such

men; nay, we have doubtless come across them in daily life. In the office, in the railway carriage, in the workshop, in the place of business, in the street, their laugh of unbelief is heard. They are very active, and they do their best to get others to join them. They would fain ridicule all around them out of their faith in God. Let us beware of allowing ourselves, even for a moment, to be shaken in our confidence; let us remember that those who join in the sneer of the unbeliever will share the unbeliever's doom.

¶ Here, I think, is the moral fault of unbelief:—that a man can bear to make so great a moral sacrifice as is implied in renouncing God. He makes the greatest moral sacrifice to obtain partial satisfaction to his intellect: a believer ensures the greatest moral perfection, with partial satisfaction to his intellect also; entire satisfaction to the intellect is, and can be, attained by neither. Thus, then, I believe, generally, that he who has rejected God must be morally faulty, and therefore justly liable to punishment. But, of course, no man can dare to apply this to any particular case, because our moral faults themselves are so lessened or aggravated by circumstances to be known only by Him who sees the heart, that the judgment of those who see the outward conduct only must ever be given in ignorance.[1]

III.

Hazael and Jehu.

i. Hazael.

1. Elisha next appears in wider political connexion with the personages and events of his time. He is described as visiting Damascus, where he unwillingly carried out one of the commissions given to Elijah at Horeb. He did not indeed "anoint" Hazael to be king over Syria, but sorrowfully foretold his elevation to the throne. When Elisha arrived in the neighbourhood of Damascus, Benhadad was lying ill. He knew the fame of Elisha as a man of God, and desired to learn through him whether he would recover from this sickness. He sent Hazael, his commander-in-chief, laden with presents, to learn his fate from the seer. Elisha's reply was uncertain: according to one reading,

[1] *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold*, i. 322.

he bade Hazael return and tell the king that he should certainly recover; according to another reading (the *kethibh*, and therefore probably authentic), Hazael was to reply that Benhadad should certainly die. At any rate, Elisha left Hazael in no doubt that the king was not to recover, and that his successor was none other than Hazael himself.

2. Elisha had read Hazael's guilty secret, just as, long before, he had read Gehazi's guilty secret. Hazael had, in his inmost heart, conceived a plot. No doubt he had often been contrasting his own vigour with the decrepit, nominal king, and had nursed ambitious hopes, which gradually turned to dark resolves.

While Hazael stood waiting before him, the prophet of Israel looked upon the Syrian with a fixed, intent gaze. Only when he noted that Hazael's conscience was troubled by the glittering eyes which seemed to read the inmost secrets of his heart did Elisha drop his glance, and burst into tears. "Why weepeth my lord?" asked Hazael, in still deeper uneasiness. In answer, the prophet read off the blood-red vision, revealing the scourge which this man before him would yet prove to Israel. The revelation, described though it was with painful literalness, in no way shocked Hazael. In his eyes the picture was one of military glory, of conquest, with its attendant massacres, wherein the accompaniment of suffering and death to others was a small thing. Yet, though his heart leaped with joy at the possible realization of his dreams, he kept up the semblance of humility in his reply: "What, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" Elisha was in no way deceived by the wily, ambitious Syrian, but answered that the throne of Syria was his ambition, and that he would yet reach it.

3. This conversation with Elisha seems to have accelerated Hazael's purpose, as if the prediction were to his mind a justification of his means of fulfilling it. By his deed, or another's, the king died, not of his illness, but apparently by accident; and Hazael was at once raised to the throne of Syria. Under him Damascus again became a formidable power. In spite of his humble anticipation of himself, he

turned out to be all that the prophet had foretold,—"mighty and of great power."

¶ The scene has sometimes been misrepresented to Elisha's discredit, as though he suggested to the general the crimes of murder and rebellion. The accusation is entirely untenable. Elisha was, indeed, in one sense, commissioned to anoint Hazael king of Syria, because the cruel soldier had been predestined by God to that position; but, in another sense, he had no power whatever to give to Hazael the mighty kingdom of Aram, nor to wrest it from the dynasty which had now held it for many generations. All this was brought about by the Divine purpose, in a course of events entirely out of the sphere of the humble man of God. In the transferring of this crown he was in no sense the agent or the suggester. The thought of usurpation must, without doubt, have been already in Hazael's mind. Ben-hadad, as far as we know, was childless. At any rate he had no natural heirs, and seems to have been a drunken king, whose reckless undertakings and immense failures had so completely alienated the affections of his subjects from himself and his dynasty that he died undesired and unlamented, and no hand was uplifted to strike a blow in his defence. It hardly needed a prophet to foresee that the sceptre would be snatched by so strong a hand as that of Hazael from a grasp so feeble as that of Ben-hadad II. The utmost that Elisha had done was, under Divine guidance, to read his character and his designs, and to tell him that the accomplishment of these designs was near at hand.[1]

ii. Jehu.

The third commission entrusted to Elijah at Horeb was still unfulfilled; Jehu had to be anointed king of Israel. Elisha took the first step in this revolution, but apparently no further part in its blood-stained course. The occasion was a campaign against Syria, at Ramoth-gilead, again, as in Ahab's time, a centre of contention. Ahab's son Joram was wounded, and went home to Samaria to be cured. His ally the king of Judah left the army, and went to visit him. During their absence Elisha called one of the sons of the prophets, and sent him to Ramoth-gilead, with instructions to seek out Jehu, and secretly anoint him king. As soon as Jehu divulged the secret to his brother officers, they proclaimed him king, and the whole army at once espoused his cause. The nation had long been ready for a change, and the

[1] F. W. Farrar.

house of Omri fell without being able to strike a blow in self-defence. Throughout all the bloodthirsty though imperative reforms that Jehu carried out, Elisha kept entirely in the background.

¶ Personal ambition and blind religious zeal were so blended in the energetic, ruthless character of Jehu that his revolution was the most bloody recorded in all of Israel's history. . . . According to the tradition, his religious fervour was not cooled until all the prophets and worshippers of Baal, together with the pillar and temple, were completely destroyed. Jehu's acts were doubtless approved by the extremists of his day. It is true that the evils which he undertook to correct were deep-seated and deadly. Disloyalty to Jehovah was counted in ancient Israel as treason, and treason in all ages has been punished by death. Jehu also lived before the conception of Jehovah as the God not only of justice but of love had been clearly proclaimed to the race. But measured even by the standards of his own age, his deeds as recorded by tradition cannot be wholly justified. Politically, Jehu's policy of slaying the leaders of his nation was as disastrous as it was indefensible. It left his kingdom weak and open to attack on every side at the moment when all its strength was needed to meet the great dangers which impended. The prophet Hosea, who saw clearly the mistakes of the past, absolutely condemned Jehu's bloody acts.[1]

IV.

Joash.

1. Elisha lived to extreme old age, and his last thoughts were given to his country. It is clear that there is a long blank in the story of his life. For nearly sixty years he was the great religious force in the land, and on many occasions the guide of her policy at home and abroad. Yet for more than forty years we have no record at all (unless some of the miracles fall within this period) of how that time was spent, or how that influence told upon the history of his native country. It is sad to reflect that, in spite of all his labours, Israel had become feeble and dependent. During the reigns of the pusillanimous sons of Jehu, the Syrians had done to Israel according to their will, and

[1] C. F. Kent, *The Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah*, 49.

the nation had more than once been brought to the verge of extinction.

2. But at last a brighter day began to dawn. Already in the time of Jehoahaz there was a promise of a great deliverer. In the days of Joash, Elisha himself foresaw the first turn of the fortune which he had so mournfully predicted. The last scene of his life showed how deeply the Syrian war coloured all his thoughts, as well as those of the king. When he was now struck with his mortal sickness, the young Joash came to visit the aged seer who had placed his grandfather on the throne, and wept over his face. No words could be more appropriate than those in which he addressed the prophet: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" Elisha had still the spirit of the master to whom he first applied these words. To impress on the young king's mind a sense of his duty, he used a fine piece of symbolism. He bade the king open the window and shoot an arrow eastward, calling it "the Lord's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria." He then directed the king to strike on the ground with the rest of the arrows. "And he smote thrice, and stayed." The energy of the youth was not equal to the energy of the expiring prophet, who burst out in indignation on his dying bed—"Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." The prophet perhaps read the king's character by the indecisive way in which he performed what he must have known to be intended as a "sign" from Jehovah.

¶ He was never very ready to talk about himself, but when asked what he regarded as his master secret, he always said, "Concentration." Slackness of mind, vacuity of mind, the wheels of the mind revolving without biting the rails of the subject, were insupportable. Such habits were of the family of fainthearted-ness, which he abhorred. Steady practice of instant, fixed, effectual attention was the key alike to his rapidity of apprehension and to his powerful memory. By instinct, by nature, by constitution, he was a man of action in all the highest senses of a phrase too narrowly applied and too narrowly construed. The currents of daimonic energy seemed never to stop, the vivid susceptibility to impressions never to grow dull. He was an

idealist, yet always applying ideals to their purposes in act. Toil was his native element. There was nobody like him when it came to difficult business for bending his whole strength to it, like a mighty archer stringing a stiff bow.[1]

V

Elisha's Bones.

There is one other tradition regarding Elisha, and that the most marvellous of all. His wonder-working power did not terminate with his life. In the spring of the year after his death a burial was taking place in the cemetery which contained his sepulchre, when it chanced that a band of marauding Moabites came in sight. The Moabites had now had time to recover from their great defeat by Jehoram and Jehoshaphat; they had spread themselves over the districts north of the river Arnon; and every year, when the spring crops were just ripe, their hordes poured over the fields of Samaria on their errand of plunder and violence. It was one of these bands of spoilers that was observed in the distance by the mourners. They wished to put the corpse for safety into the nearest hiding-place before the Moabites were upon them. It may have been accident, it may have been design, which led them to choose the tomb of Elisha; it may have been the depth and spaciousness of the cave; it may have been the prophet's reputation for sanctity. So, as the original says, "they thrust the man into the sepulchre." "And," we are told, "as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."

There is no other miracle in Holy Scripture which is exactly like this: and it certainly is much more striking than any of those which were performed by Elisha during his lifetime. It produced a great effect upon the Jews; they held this posthumous miracle to be Elisha's chief title to distinction among the prophets. "After his death his body prophesied," or taught—that was his crowning glory in the Jewish school.

¶ Alone of all the graves of the saints of the Old Testament, there were wonders wrought at Elisha's resting-place which

[1] Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, i. 186.

seemed to continue after death the grace of his long and gentle life. It was believed that by the mere touch of his bones a dead corpse was re-animated. In this, as in so much beside, his life and miracles are not Jewish but Christian. His works stand alone in the Bible in their likeness to the acts of mediæval saints. There alone in the Sacred History the gulf between Biblical and Ecclesiastical miracles almost disappears. The exception proves the general rule; still it is but just to notice the exception.[1]

¶ In Dinet's *Saint Symphorien d'Autun*, there is attributed to the body of St. Virgilius, who died A.D. 610, a miraculous power similar to that recorded in Scripture in the case of Elisha's bones. "When the funeral procession of the saint arrived at the grave, and the remains were about to be lifted therein," we are told, "all of a sudden came persons carrying the body of one dead. It was that of a young girl, the only child of her mother, and she was a widow. The bearers, out of breath, implored the clergy to let the dead body touch that of the deceased prelate. The permission was granted, and at a given signal all the immense crowd fell on their knees, waiting to see what would happen. Forthwith the 'Kyrie Eleison' was intoned; a thousand voices or more took up the chant, and at the seventh repetition, the young girl rose on her feet in the presence of the whole multitude. A shudder ran through the crowd, a silence ensued unbroken by a single sound, then a sudden reaction took place, a shout of joy burst forth, the funeral hymn was changed to a song of praise, the funeral procession to a march of triumph. The resuscitated damsel, pressed on all sides by the crowd, went homewards, crying as she went along, 'O blessed bishop! O good and holy pastor! How am I thy debtor! How powerful thy merits! Well hast thou shown thy inheritance to eternal life in giving me back to life.'"

¶ The relation between Elijah and Elisha was of a particularly close kind, and may be compared with that between Moses and Joshua or David and Solomon. The one is the complement of the other; the resemblances, and still more the marked contrast between the character and activity of each, qualified both together for the common discharge of one great work by "diversity of operation." The difference between them is much more striking than the resemblance. Elijah is the prophet of the wilderness, rugged and austere; Elisha is the prophet of civilized life, of the city and the court, with the dress, manners, and appearance of "other grave citizens." Elijah is the messenger of vengeance,—sudden, fierce, and overwhelming; Elisha is the messenger of mercy and restoration. Elijah's miracles, with few exceptions,

[1] A. P. Stanley, *History of the Jewish Church*, ii. 279.

are works of wrath and destruction; Elisha's miracles, with but one notable exception, are works of beneficence and healing. Elijah is the "prophet as fire" (Ecclesiasticus xlviii. 1), an abnormal agent working for exceptional ends; Elisha is the "holy man of God which passeth by us continually," mixing in the common life of the people, and promoting the advancement of the Kingdom of God in its ordinary channels of mercy, righteousness, and peace.[1]

[1] W. Robertson Smith, in *The Encyclopædia Britannica* (ninth ed.), viii. 140

GEHAZI.

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GEHAZI.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha . . . went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.—2 Kings v. 20, 27.

1. GEHAZI is one of those men whom later ages have accepted as a type. His very name has come to be representative of a particular character. As Job stands with us for the innocent sufferer, Jacob for the man of shrewd bargains, Solomon for the sage, and Daniel for the righteous judge, so does Gehazi stand for the courteous liar. We might call him the Ananias of the Old Testament; and we might further note that his sin, like that of Ananias, was followed by a sudden and signal judgment. The imagination pictures him an abject figure, a convicted swindler, who shrinks from the presence of his master, branded with the most terrible bodily curse with which a man can be visited, and with a load of moral infamy which neither lapse of time nor depth of charity has ever been able to efface. But he cannot have been all bad and always bad. He is evidently a rather commonplace type of sinner, who could understand his master's power and rough strength, but not any finer or more spiritual qualities. He is self-important and more or less vain, and beneath these surface characteristics there is a strain of covetousness, developing into a besetting sin.

2. We know little of him, and it is easy to say too much. One might well wish to connect Gehazi with many or most of the stirring scenes in Elisha's life; but the chronology of the various incidents is too confused to allow us to do this with certainty. Yet this seems clear, that his is the tragedy of a man ruined by familiarity with sacred things. He belonged to very serious times, and never realized their importance; he had the great example of his master ever before his eyes, and wholly missed its significance. We see in him an utter want of appreciation of

moral proportion, a confusion between substance and shadow, a condition of mind in which great things dwindle or pass out of sight, while the whole horizon is blocked by petty considerations and small selfish interests. He dwelt with a hero yet was a poltroon. He lived with a saint yet was a knave. He was the associate of a prophet yet was a petty thief.

¶ You can scarcely conceive of anything more debasing or hardening to a human soul than to keep up a profession of religion, or assume an attitude of superior sanctity, merely to throw dust in the eyes of others, and thus secure a confidence, credit, or favour which would not otherwise be obtained. The minister of the gospel who uses his position to gratify his own covetousness, —who takes advantage of the respect shown him for his Master's sake, in order to secure ends of which he knows that Christ would not approve,—what is he but a Gehazi? And any man who employs his connection with a Christian Church in order to worm himself into a confidence which he does not at all deserve, or to get a place in a "will" to which he is not at all entitled, or to obtain a loan which he never intends to repay,—what is he, too, but a Gehazi? Better open your shop in a neighbourhood of infidels, and get your living amongst them by selling honest goods at an honest price, than begin to value your connection with a Christian Church chiefly because it brings you custom and helps to fill your till. Better become bankrupt over and over again, than begin to value your profession of Christian faith chiefly as a means of eking out your commercial credit.[1]

What is known of Gehazi is told in three narratives.

i. Gehazi and the Shunammite.

1. In the story of the Shunammite woman, we see Gehazi a shrewd man, intensely secular, and naturally suspicious, with none of his master's spirituality. Elisha, having failed to persuade his benefactress to ask any favour, turned in perplexity to consult his servant. Gehazi, who certainly had keen worldly insight, and had read the Shunammite's longing for a son, replied: "Verily, she hath no son, and her husband is old." Elisha perceived that his servant's insight had surpassed his own, and, recalling the Shunammite, promised that the desire of her heart would be granted.

2. In the sequel to the story, when the lady, bereft of this child of promise, came in haste to the retreat at Carmel and cast

[1] T. C. Finlayson.

herself at the prophet's feet in a passion of grief, Gehazi's commonplace mind was shocked at this liberty taken by a woman. From a spurious zeal for his master's honour, from false notions of what was or was not becoming—the consequences of his utter want of spiritual insight and sympathy—Gehazi would have thrust her away. He was absolutely incapable of understanding the impulses of deep feeling. But Elisha stretched his hand over her tenderly. "Let her alone," he said, "her soul is bitter within her"; and, when she had revealed the cause of her grief, Elisha at once sent Gehazi with his staff, the rod of his authority, the sacred symbol of the prophet, to lay it upon the child. And Gehazi went in haste, crept to the still room, and laid the rod upon the child, and waited and listened. But all was in vain. Virtue had perished out of Elisha's staff; it had become in the grip of Gehazi but a common stick. He literally obeyed his master's behest, and laid the staff upon the face of the child, but the mightiest instruments are weak when selfishness and coldness wield them.

¶ The worst of it is that men do not realize their potentialities. So often, while they possess the false self-confidence which makes them conceited, they lack the other self-confidence which makes men strong. So often intellectual ability is mistaken for spiritual power. For example, in the case of a Minister of Religion, the learned, studious man, the thoughtful reader of many and profound books, is not by these means necessarily made a power in his work. True, he possesses the tools of his trade, and without his tools little can be done. But tools need behind them the man; they will not act of themselves. It is a vast mistake to suppose that the real success of such a man's life depends wholly on his knowledge and intellectual attainments. Before these he needs the subtle Spiritual Force which alone can make these tools to be mightily effective in his hands. The masculine powers of service and of work need a motive, driving energy. In a word they are practically useless without Spiritual Power.[1]

ii. Gehazi and Naaman.

1. In the story of Naaman, Gehazi appears as a finished example of covetousness. Elisha, by God's will and power, had healed Naaman, and after having healed him he had refused,

[1] C. D. Lampen, *Spiritual Power*, 124.

though urgently pressed, to take any present of him. He had refused for two reasons: first, that he might not seem to assume to himself the credit of the cure; and second, to teach the Syrians that health, which is the gift of God, was not to be purchased by money. He wanted Naaman's eyes to be fixed upon God. To God alone must the grateful offering be given. He refused the offered portion of "this world's good," lest Naaman's sense of gratitude and indebtedness to God should be in any way lessened or impaired. Thus Elisha had his opportunity and made his choice. Gehazi also had his opportunity, and he also made his choice.

¶ Every stage of life brings its opportunity and its temptation. Continually we are confronted with the two roads: the broad way to destruction, the narrow path to life. We must decide on which we will walk. Every day there is presented to us some opportunity, some advantage, some opening towards truth, goodness, success, heaven, which we may either improve or despise, but which will never occur again. Now behind all these special opportunities of life stands the great economy of Redemption: the Divine Love, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the agency of the Holy Ghost, the means of grace; all given, instituted by Almighty God, that each one of us might live his best life, and find the true path, and rise superior to all that would tempt and destroy. See how it was with Gehazi. Elisha stood as the expression of this fact of God's redeeming love and grace. He was God's witness to that age. He bore his testimony on behalf of the spiritual life, and against the sins of Israel. He declared God's message to the nation, and to every individual member of it. Gehazi came under the influence of Elisha. It was his great opportunity. He heard the word of God from the lips of this great prophet. The way of purity and righteousness was set before him in the daily life of his master. He heard the call to throw his life definitely on the side of God and goodness. He was continually reminded by all the acts of Elisha what his life ought to be. And thus Gehazi, like each one of us, had his great chance. He saw what he could be; the ideal of his own life was there embodied and realized in the life of the man of God with whom he lived. He was surrounded by all these sacred influences that he might not take the downward path, that he might choose the good and live. The opportunity was given to him, and urged upon him. There was no mistake about it. The way to glory and honour and immortality and eternal life was pointed out, and he was called to walk in it. And what was the result? What was the issue of it all? It was this: when the crisis came, when the

temptation reached Gehazi which would reveal definitely and finally which path he should choose, what he would do with life, on which side he elected to stand, in that solemn and awful moment Gehazi turned a traitor to his trust; he rejected the counsel of God against himself, he sold his birthright, he lied, he cheated, he deceived, he became a vagabond, "he went out from the presence of Elisha a leper as white as snow." [1]

2. Gehazi looked on in amazement at the prophet's refusal. He could not feel the power of Elisha's spiritual motives in sparing Naaman and letting him go free of payment. Gratuitous services were not in harmony with his mercenary spirit. Look which way he would, the money that had been lost, the gain that had not been made, was ever alluring his debased soul. Elisha's refusal was incredible; all the oracles of the nations expected gifts. The man's commercial instincts were in despair at such unheard-of waste of chances.

¶ How differently the same sight affected the man who lived near God and the one who lived by sense! Elisha had no desires stirred by the wealth in Naaman's train. Gehazi's mouth watered after it. Regulate desires and you rule conduct. The true regulation of desires is found in communion with God. Gehazi had a sordid soul, like Judas; and, like the traitor Apostle, he was untouched by contact with goodness and unworldliness. Perhaps the parallel might be carried farther, and both were moved with coarse contempt for their master's silly indifference to earthly good. That feeling speaks in Gehazi's soliloquy. He evidently thought the prophet a fool for having let "this Syrian" off so easily. He was fair game, and he had brought the wealth on purpose to leave it. Profanity speaks in uttering a solemn oath on such an occasion. The putting side by side of "the Lord liveth" and "I will run after him" would be ludicrous if it were not horrible. How much profanity may live close beside a prophet, and learn nothing from him but a holy name to sully in an oath! [2]

3. So Gehazi ran after the chariot of the departing stranger; and as he ran, he invented a plausible lie: "My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." Naaman

[1] A. Jenkinson, *A Modern Disciple*, 158. [2] Alexander Maclaren.

at once gave him more than he had requested, and sent two servants back with the present to the house of Elisha. There Gehazi relieved them of their burden, which he at once stored in the secret hiding-place known as the Tower on the Hill, and quietly presented himself before his master. The question was at once put: "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" and in accents of injured innocence the ready lie was uttered: "Thy servant went no whither." Adding another lie to his daring theft, he stood before the man of God a consummate villain. The great work had been done and God's glory had been declared; and now Gehazi had betrayed the cause of God, sold the honour of the Lord, and turned traitor to his master. He had just seen the most wonderful thing in all the world, the dawn of faith in a human soul; but the only impression which it left with him was the fancied vision of himself clad in coloured silk.

¶ No man can be covetous at heart for long without his covetousness finding some embodiment in his life. True, it will not necessarily embody itself in falsehood and theft, but there will be danger of its leading on even to these vices. The commercial world is only too full of illustrations of this danger. Many a man has begun by just being too fond of money, too desirous of making a show in the world, too anxious to get gain; and he has ended by obtaining goods on false pretences, or by forging some document, or embezzling some money, or using false weights and measures, or telling lies to cheat the revenue, or tampering with figures in a cash-book, or misleading and defrauding his creditors, or representing goods to be what they are not, or robbing widows and orphans who have trusted their money to his keeping, or using some other of the thousand and one methods by which human beings trick each other for gain. And, alas! we sometimes find that such fraud has been going on where we would never have expected it; that some member of a Christian Church, whom everybody has believed to be devout and upright, has been living—it may be for years even—the life of a liar and a thief. Talk of the lofty graces of Christianity! Why, it sometimes seems as if we had need to come back again to the grand old simple virtues of honesty and truth.[1]

4. With an eye from which fire flashed, and in words that scathed the scoundrel at whom they were flung, Elisha denounced

[1] T. C. Finlayson.

Gehazi's conduct. Then came the dreadful words of doom that turned him to a living sarcasm, the white leprosy covering the black falsehood of the heart; and he crawled back to that Tower to look upon his silk and his silver, and to gaze desperately down the tainted line of his posterity. His punishment was severe, but it must be felt to be a sentence of meet retribution. The Syrian had become an Israelite in heart and spirit, and he was healed of his leprosy in Israel's waters. The Israelite had become heathen in heart and spirit, and he and his were struck with the leprosy of the Syrian, whose money he had coveted for himself and his family.

¶ Much of Phillips Brooks' time during his tour in Europe and India in 1882–3 was given to writing in his note-book the thoughts or impressions he was receiving. Everywhere are interspersed suggestions for sermons, such as: "We are not called upon to set in opposition the two great conceptions of the results of conduct, one of which thinks of them as inevitable consequences naturally produced, and the other as the rewards and punishments meted out by the superior insight and justice of a ruling Lord. Each conception has its value which we cannot afford to lose in seeking for the total truth. The first gives reasonableness and reliability to the whole idea. The second preserves the vividness of personality. The time was when the second conception monopolized men's thought. In the present strong reaction from the second to the first conception, it would be a great loss if we let the second be denied or fade into forgetfulness." [1]

5. It is not enough to point to Gehazi's fate as a startling piece of poetical justice so called. It is not enough to speak of him as a foolish, mistaken, unlucky man. He is all that; but he is much more. He is a great failure. Contrast him as he stands before us now with what he might have been, with what he was intended to be. He is one who has made shipwreck of great chances and promising opportunities. His temptation came suddenly and unexpectedly, as temptations generally do. It was all over in an hour, and he had fallen from respect and honour into ruin and disgrace: but the trial would not have worked out in that fatal and overwhelming way had there not been inward weakness and rottenness. Gehazi had not been growing silently into a good man in the service of Elisha. He was, like Judas the

[1] A. V. G. Allen, *Phillips Brooks: Memories of his Life*, 381.

betrayer, very near to the light and the truth, in daily intercourse with one who could have saved him; but it was doing him no good; and when the temptation came, he fell, without a struggle, down into shameful ruin. His discipleship had taught him absolutely nothing. Light was in the world for him, and he "loved darkness rather than light." He does not seem to have gained an inkling of what makes life worth living. To him the prophet was a common man, and the times were common times. Elisha was his paymaster and nothing more. The great events in the midst of which he was living suggested nothing beyond the chance of personal gain.

¶ While Bernard and Francis thus stood together [as Bernard distributed all his property to the poor], it happened that a priest came by, from whom Francis had bought stone for the restoration of San Damiano. This priest, whose name was Silvester, had sold the stone cheap—perhaps on account of the good object it was to be devoted to. When he now saw so much money given away to the poor he approached and said to Francis: "The stone which you in your time bought from me, you paid for only poorly." Incensed at the covetousness of the priest, Francis suddenly reached down into the money, which Bernard had in the lap of his cloak, and without counting the amount, poured it out into the priest's hand as he asked: "I wonder if you are now satisfied, Sir Priest?" But Silvester thanked him coldly and went away. As the legends tell, this occurrence was none the less the beginning of a new life for the avaricious priest. He began to draw comparisons between his own avarice and the contempt for property and gold shown by these two young laymen, and the words "No one can serve two masters" began to ring like a judgment in his soul over the life he had hitherto led; after a further delay he too had to come to Francis, and beg him to receive him among the Brethren.[1]

¶ Avarice—this vice has one terrible power in it: life tends to strengthen it. It is the vice of old age in the sense that the experiences of life are often taken as an excuse—and a powerfully plausible one—for niggardliness. It calls itself prudence; it withers the love of better and nobler things and renders all work valueless (*Purg.* xix. 121–123). The vital power goes out of every effort; so these sinners lie prostrate on the ground, useless and unprogressive. Their faces are set now, as in their life below, earthward. Like the fallen angels described in *Paradise Lost*,

[1] J. Jörgensen, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 65.

who, even in heaven, looked not upward to God but downward to gain:

> Mammon led them on;
> Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
> From heaven; for e'en in heaven his looks and thoughts
> Were always downward bent, admiring more
> The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
> Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
> In vision beatific.[1]

iii. Gehazi and Jehoram.

In the third narrative, Gehazi appears engaged in conversation with king Jehoram, who had called him to recite the story of Elisha's wonderful deeds. Gehazi is telling of the restoration of the Shunammite's son to life, when the lady herself comes on the scene to petition the king to reinstate her in the house and land which she had lost during a recent famine. The difficulty of imagining the king talking to a leper and Gehazi glorifying Elisha has led some critics to suppose that this narrative is misplaced, and should appear before 2 Kings v. But conversation with lepers was not forbidden; and the narrative reads quite naturally as it stands. The story certainly shows Gehazi in a more favourable light than the previous narratives. The notice taken of him by the king, and the truthfulness and respect with which he recounts the deeds of his former master, may be charitably taken to indicate that affliction had at last made him a wiser and better man.

¶ Happy was it for Gehazi, if, while his skin was snow white with leprosy, his humbled soul was washed white as snow with the water of true repentance.[2]

iv. Gehazi's Failure.

1. As Elisha had succeeded Elijah, so it would seem as if Gehazi was to succeed Elisha. He was "the servant of the man of God." He bore the wonder-working staff. He "stood before" his master as a slave. He introduced strangers to the prophet's presence. He was "the dear heart" of the prophet's affection. But, as has so often happened in like successions of the Christian Church, in the successors of St. Francis, of Ignatius Loyola, and

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter, *The Spiritual Message of Dante*, 168. [2] Bishop Hall.

of John Wesley, the original piety and vigour have failed in the next generation. There was a coarse grain in the servant which parted him entirely from his master. He and his children were known, in after-times, only as the founders of a race of lepers, bearing on their foreheads the marks of an accursed ancestry.

The heinousness of Gehazi's guilt lies in the words *Corruptio optimi pessima*. When religion is used for a cloke of covetousness, of usurping ambition, of secret immorality, it becomes deadlier than infidelity. Men raze the sanctuary, and build their idol temples on the hallowed ground. They cover their base encroachments and impure designs with the "cloke of profession, doubly lined with the fox-fur of hypocrisy," and hide the leprosy which is breaking out upon their foreheads with the golden *petalon* on which is inscribed the title of "holiness to the Lord."

¶ John succeeded Macarius, abbot of Alexandria, A.D. 394. St. Macarius, knowing his great foible, had said to him, "Brother, your great temptation is avarice. Resist it, or be assured the lot of Gehazi will be yours also." Instead of profiting by this advice, as soon as Macarius was dead, and John succeeded to the abbacy, he appropriated to himself the revenues which belonged to the poor, and became a leper, covered with elephantiasis, "qu'on ne trouvait pas en tout son corps la largeur d'un doigt qui n'en fût gâté."[1]

2. How, then, has this tragedy of Gehazi come to pass? Every one knows the answer of the man in the street, then and now. "Oh," he would laugh, "the nearer the church the farther from grace." And in that answer there is a terrible and searching truth. All contact with holy things is inevitably of the nature of a crisis: familiarity with them is dangerous and exacting. It is the old danger of touching the ark of God; it is the danger which Meredith sees still when he sings—

Enter these enchanted woods, ye who dare.

When the first touch of awe is on the man, let him take a thorough dealing with his soul, for if he surrender it not then to God he will surely mortgage it to the devil.

¶ We are face to face with a very terrible fact here. All ministers especially, and all who engage in work about religion

[1] *Les Petits Bollandistes* (1880), Jan. 2.

and its ordinances, must surely stand in awe of the dangers of familiarity. Yet this is a danger also for all who habitually hear or read or think of holy things, or handle them in the Sacraments. If faith be shallow and love half-hearted, if the wonder of this approach be not day by day renewed, and all rival passions that war against the soul suppressed, then will come the sure vengeance of sacred things profaned, and familiarity will sink into contempt. But familiarity needs not thus to sink. If the soul's surrender be complete, the wonder will not only last but will increase, and each day of sacred service will break with the freshness of a new revelation. For the treasures of faith are inexhaustible, and the returns of God to the faithful are fresh as the dew of each new morning.[1]

[1] J. Kelman, *Ephemera Eternitatis*, 204.

NAAMAN,

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NAAMAN.

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the Lord had given victory unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valour, but he was a leper.—2 Kings v. 1.

A PART of the misery inflicted by the Syrians on Israel was caused by the forays in which their light-armed bands, very much like the borderers on the marches of Wales or Scotland, descended upon the country and carried off plunder and captives before they could be pursued.

In one of these raids they had seized a little Israelitish girl and sold her to be a slave. She had been purchased for the household of Naaman, the captain of the Syrian host, who had helped his king and nation to win important victories either against Israel or against Assyria. Ancient Jewish tradition identified him with the man who had "drawn his bow at a venture" and slain King Ahab. The story is told because it is one of the miracles wrought by Elisha.

¶ Our Saviour's miracles were intended for the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet one, like a crumb, fell from the table to a woman of Canaan; so this one miracle Elisha wrought for Naaman, a Syrian; for God doth good to all, and will have all men to be saved.[1]

I.

NAAMAN AND THE CAPTIVE MAID.

Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy.—2 Kings v. 3.

1. Few figures in the Old Testament impress us with a more living and human interest than that of Naaman the Syrian. He

[1] Matthew Henry.

appears as one of the first gentlemen of Damascus, and Damascus was the Paris of the ancient East. It was famous as the chief centre of the Aramæan caravan traffic, and was consequently the commercial capital of a vast region of land. It was famous also for its beauty, and was well-named "the Pearl," lying like a white star caught and glad to stay in the luxuriant wealth of green that everywhere surrounds it—an exquisite oasis rescued by the Abana from the edge of the tawny desert. From age to age it lies there, sphinx-like in its gaze across the desert, unheeding of the flight of time or the passing of the generations, sufficient to itself and absorbed wholly in its own wonderful life. Add to all this the fact that for the time being it was rejoicing in a victory over its Western rival Israel, and you have the very place where a man might be content with the earth, and, unlike Mohammed, wish for no other Paradise.

At the forefront of all this stands Naaman, wealthy, famous, victorious; popular alike with his king and with his servants, beloved and happy in his home. Yet upon him has come the terrific doom of leprosy, running its iron wedge deep into the golden dream. Suddenly the spell is broken and we seem to hear the sickening of the music, and to see the fountains dying and the sunshine fading out. From an enchantment, life has become a delirium. Everything has lost its reality, and the phantom world about him is full of mockery.

¶ I do not think that Naaman in his popularity and success was a much-envied man. There was the fame and the power—and the leprosy. There was the honour—and the suffering. It is always so. There is always the other side of things. And if we could change personalities, we should have to be prepared to take not only the joys and the opportunities and the satisfactions of that other man's life, but also the martyrdoms, the bafflements, the burdens and the unlifting shadows. And remembering this may help to make us less envious and more sympathetic. No man's life-story can be told without naming the hard thing in it—sometimes the tragically hard thing. For some it is persistent ill-health—a body that is continually disappointing them, failing them, thwarting them. For some it is a nervous temperament that demands a cruel price for the fulfilment of daily demands—demands which others can meet with ease, and even with pleasure. For this man it is the shadow of a cruel and devastating experience that must lie on his path to the last step of it; and for that

it is some constitutional defect that has to be reckoned with in everything he does. In short, Naaman the leper may be looked upon as typical of the widest and most familiar range of human experience.[1]

2. Naaman, honoured by the king, honoured by the people, living splendidly, going forth surrounded with a guard of honour whenever he appeared, is yet a broken man. One little ingredient in his cup has poisoned all the rest. "He was captain of the host of the king of Syria"; he was "a great man with his master, and honourable . . . he was also a mighty man of valour, *but* he was a leper." The brief monosyllable "but" forms the bridge connecting the two parts of the picture, yet when we look at the two sides we see a most striking contrast. On one side all is bright and dazzling, on the other dark and dismal. For a time we rejoice with the conquering hero, but when we come to the mournful monosyllable our joy is turned into sadness.

Leprosy was the scourge of Eastern people—the great typical disease that admitted of no ordinary healing—everything that could be done had been done in Naaman's case, everything in vain. There was no hope of cure; there was only a looking forward to loathsome death.

¶ Leprosy occupies a peculiar position among diseases affecting the human race. It is the most ancient, the most exclusively human, and in the popular conception the most dreaded of all diseases. It is a universal malady, affecting all races and occurring in all climates and under all conditions of life. Although no race is immune, racial peculiarities, climate, and the hygienic habits of civilization undoubtedly modify its spread. Unlike the plagues and pestilences which formerly swept away entire populations and devastated countries and then disappeared for ever, leprosy has at certain periods of the world's history raged as a veritable epidemic and then subsided and apparently disappeared, but it has never become extinct. It has preserved its individuality through all the vicissitudes of time. It still survives and maintains its supremacy as the patriarch of diseases. Although leprosy has existed in all periods of the world's history and afforded abundant opportunities for its observation and study, it is the reproach of medical science that, in some respects, it is to-day the most mysterious and obscure of all diseases, especially in its modes of communication, its variable virulence, and its faculty of remaining latent for a long period and then reawakening into activity.

[1] P. C. Ainsworth, *The Pilgrim Church*, 186.

It is not necessary to enter into an analysis of the arguments used *pro* and *con* as to the identity of the leprosy of the Bible with modern leprosy. While it is certain that nothing corresponding to the objective features of tubercular leprosy can be found in the Mosaic descriptions, there is a general consensus of opinion among authorities that the leprosy of the Bible is nerve leprosy, such as is met with in India and in Palestine at the present day. Many commentators believe that the affection of Job was tubercular leprosy. Certainly the description of the disease with which Job was afflicted presents striking resemblances to this form of the disease. The fact that Job, Naaman, and others mentioned as being stricken with leprosy were restored to health when suffering from a disease recognized as incurable does not necessarily militate against this view. In the Old Testament Scriptures both good and evil were attributed to Divine agency, and it is not surprising that leprosy was regarded as a manifestation of Divine life and punishment for sin, and the cure in any case was regarded as miraculous and the work of Divine intervention.[1]

3. At last a ray of hope enters. A little maid, brought away captive out of the land of Israel, tells of a prophet there who possesses a charm even for the plague of leprosy. She was just a young girl, whose very name is unknown, who occupied a comparatively obscure position in life, who had her trials and her difficulties to encounter in the midst of strangers; but she was, nevertheless, the very hinge and mainspring of the wonderful events which are here narrated. But for her we should never have heard of Naaman the Syrian; but for her the king of Syria would never have heard of Elisha the prophet; but for her the victorious general would never have been healed of his leprosy; but for her he would never have renounced the idols of his country, or learned to worship the only true God. The history of that little maid, amidst her sorrows and her trials, was being shaped by the overruling hand of God for His own glory, and the good of her fellow-creatures.

No outward lot could well be more unfortunate than hers. Many of us know what it is to leave our homes. We have felt the heart-sinking, such as no other sorrow brings, when the wrench of parting with all the tender surroundings and all the mute associations of our childhood is followed by the feel-

[1] P. A. Morrow, in *Twentieth Century Practice of Medicine*, xviii. 616.

ing that we are amongst strangers and must stand alone; but she had far more to bear than this. Torn from slaughtered relatives and a ruined home; placed among people of a strange face and language, who looked upon her countrymen with contempt; not a servant, but a slave, a victim to tyranny and blows and cruelty, she yet kept alive in her heart the knowledge of the God of Israel, and the memory of His wonder-working prophets; she knew that in her captivity and loneliness He had healed her sorrow; she believed that He could heal the disease and misery of her master —"Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy."

¶ The existence of insignificant people has very important consequences in the world. It can be shown to affect the price of bread and the rate of wages, to call forth many evil tempers from the selfish, and many heroisms from the sympathetic, and, in other ways, to play no small part in the tragedy of life.[1]

When, Syria, all thy waters
Run voiceless to the main,
The least of Israel's daughters
Shall rend her captor's chain:
Not for lost home appealing
Rose that sweet exile's prayer,—
"O happy land of healing,
Would that my lord were there!"

Proud disputants for power,
See whom her God, to view,
Rich in His kingdom's dower,
Sets in the midst of you!
With Jordan's washings seven,
Take, leprous soul defiled,
Bathed with the dews of heaven
The flesh of that young child!

O blessed childhood's teaching,
We know not where it strays,
Beyond the Prophet's preaching,
Above the Temple's praise!
Like coral ridges lifting
Rich streaks of verdure bright
From sea-waifs idly drifting,
Or whirl'd by sea-bird's flight.[2]

[1] George Eliot, *Adam Bede.* [2] Herbert Kynaston.

4. We take it for granted that the captive, in proportion as he clings to the fatherland and the religion of his youth, will regard his captors with a stern aloofness. It is the tendency of human nature to balance the humiliation of misfortune by a colossal pride, and to take vengeance on those who inflict the humiliation by regarding them secretly with scorn. And if, in the heartsore of absence, the little serving-maid had looked with cold eyes upon the people who had caused her sorrow; if she had even taken a certain joy in the discovery that her masters had their troubles too; if she had cherished the thought of her ancestral faith with a sense of proprietorship, and reflected that in her own dear land there were a fountain open for uncleanness and a man of God who could speak healing words, we could not have found fault with her. But that is not the attitude of this Hebrew maid. In its stead we have a beautiful unselfishness in the midst of her sufferings. No angry feeling could crush her instinctive compassion. And when she saw her master decaying before her eyes with that dreadful disease which is irremediable, and the likest sin of all physical complaints, she forgot that this was the captain of the host that had warred against her country, and of the bands that had carried her from home. She forgot that he was an enemy and a master who claimed an absolute and tyrannical right in her small person. She only saw that he was a martyr to his living death, and that all his unquestioned valour was useless to contend against an insidious foe. A woman is always a woman before she is a patriot. And a young girl may well be pardoned if she cannot bring the rancour of national animosities to choke the wells of pity in her heart.

¶ I think I see more now the misery of a large portion of my countrymen. I see it and feel it. It makes me groan, and I long and sigh to be in a situation where I could labour incessantly for their benefit. No, I would not care about comfort or enjoyment if I could only do this. . . . Often, too, I get wearied, and worn out with the sight of so much misery, and most of all, degradation, sometimes baseness and wickedness. This is the worst to bear. I frequently aspire after doing something great. . . . Yet I care not for honour or praise if I could only really do something to benefit my fellow-creatures. If I were a man I would not work for riches or to leave a wealthy family behind me.

No, I think I would work for my country, and make its people my heirs.[1]

5. And alongside this beautiful spirit of unselfishness there is a childlike faith. There is no suggestion of doubt in her utterance; she has none. She was not therefore hampered with the fear of the consequences if Naaman should follow her advice and return unhealed. She cannot, from prudence or deference, keep silence; and suddenly in her mistress's presence she breaks into an exclamation. It is not advice that she gives. It is a prayer that she utters. The little maid has taken her master's cause as her own. Hers is a child's faith, but it is a true faith, as profound as it is simple. And it is a fine certificate of character, a testimony of the trustworthiness and uprightness of this Hebrew servant girl, that her advice was not only listened to but acted upon.

¶ The first characteristic of childhood, is faith—faith whose outward form is trust. It speaks well for the beauty of the human quality of faith that it is so lovely a thing to us when we see it pure in childhood. No pleasure is so great as that which we receive, when in their hours of joy, still more when sorrow or disease attacks them, we see the light of our children's faith in us in their eyes. We grant to it as we recognize it what we should grant to nothing else—we cannot hold back from its often mute request anything which is not wrong for us to give.[2]

6. Reports of Elisha's doings—his fame, his miracle-working power—had no doubt travelled northwards to the Syrian capital, but it was on the strength of the Hebrew maid's word that action was taken. The king himself felt it would be worth a trial in order to save the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, the biggest asset of the nation alike in peace and in war. Upon what the Hebrew maid said, the monarch wrote a letter to the king of Israel. And so it came to pass that Naaman's splendid chariot, with its long train of guards and servants, rolled away from beautiful Damascus, past the Lebanon defiles, and, fording the Lebanon torrents, came to the king of Israel at Jezreel.

¶ As heathens, and especially as Syrians, neither Naaman nor Benhadad would see anything strange in the possession of such magical powers by a prophet of Israel. Similarly, it was quite in accordance with heathen notions to expect that the king of

[1] *Memoir of Anne J. Clough*, by her Niece, 36. [2] Stopford A. Brooke.

Israel could obtain from his own prophet any result which he might desire. A heathen king was always the religious as well as the political chief of his people, and to command the services and obedience of his own prophet would seem almost a matter of course.[1]

II.

Naaman and the Prophet.

If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? —2 Kings v. 13.

1. It is certainly to Naaman's credit that he was so ready to act on the hint the little maid had given, more especially as his doing so involved very considerable trouble. It is usual for a physician to go to an invalid, but in this case the invalid had to go to the physician. To a man labouring under leprosy a long journey was a serious undertaking, and yet he at once made the necessary arrangements for setting out for Israel. Unfortunately, Benhadad couched his letter in terms which nearly led to a serious misunderstanding. It did read as though Benhadad required Jehoram to cure Naaman. As the letter came from one with whom he had been at war, and was sent through the hand of the very soldier who was then commander of the Syrian army, Jehoram naturally concluded that Benhadad was seeking an excuse for another quarrel. He feared that war would be proclaimed against Israel as soon as Naaman returned to Syria uncured. It was well that the little spark was quenched before a great fire was kindled. This was providentially accomplished by the prophet Elisha. Somehow he had heard that Naaman had arrived in Israel for the purpose of having his leprosy removed. Ascertaining that he had gone by mistake to the king, he sent word that it was to *him*, not to Jehoram, that Naaman should have applied. On hearing this, Naaman, in anything but a pleasant mood, ordered his charioteer to drive to the house of Elisha. When the equipage drew up at the prophet's door, we can picture the contrast between the magnificence of the cavalcade and the humbleness of Elisha's abode.

[1] A. Edersheim, *The History of Israel and Judah*, vi. 152.

¶ Startling as is the contrast between Naaman's grandeur and his misery, between the gorgeous general's uniform and the corpse-like form it covered, it was but an extreme case of that which we see going on everywhere. The law of our outward life is Compensation; God does not give His gifts altogether unequally to men; the older we grow and the deeper we learn to look below the surface, the more clearly we see that joy and grief go together into most men's lives; that outward prosperity is often darkened by secret misery; that apparent lowliness and privation are often lightened by freedom from and ignorance of the cares that embitter higher state. Naaman would have given all his greatness, all his glory in the field of battle, all his master's love and honour, for the clear skin and healthy flowing blood and painless daily life of the meanest soldier of his guard; many a man to-day whom we are tempted to admire for his wealth or his position or his reputation or his intellect would gladly lay them down, if with them he could throw aside the secret sorrow or infirmity which underlies and poisons them. Mighty Naaman in his palace, lowly Elisha in his cottage! let him who envies those above him, and thinks his own estate unhappy by comparison, ask himself now and then whether of these two he would prefer to be. True human happiness springs not from without but from within, not from eminence and birth and wealth, but from temper and principle and habit; from the genial love of others which puts self out of sight; from the filial love of God which keeps the heart and conscience pure and undefiled.[1]

2. By a discernment instinctive to a mind in constant fellowship with God, the prophet knew that it was God's purpose to save Naaman by the word of an invisible messenger, and he refused to assume a position which might obscure that all-important fact. It was most important that this should be so, and Elisha must needs keep himself in the background. The Syrian religion, in which the unhappy soldier had been bred, was to a great extent dependent upon the senses, and such a religion leaves little room for spiritual views of God and for the exercise of that faith according to which God adjusts the bestowment of His gifts. Naaman wanted to see a process. He was accredited by a sealed and formal letter from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, and he doubtless expected the missive to work wonders. At the first glance it might look like a bit of courtly etiquette for the

[1] W. Tuckwell, *Nuggets from the Bible Mine*, 119.

head of one State to approach the prophet of a neighbouring State through the established diplomatic channels; but there is a deep religious offence in it that does not appear at first. He was going to get at Elisha by dictating to his overlord, or at least that construction might be placed upon the method. From the beginning, Oriental potentates have been flattered into the idea that their sceptre is swayed in some sense over the very gods; for all the gods reign by State decrees, and the mortal on the throne often puts down one and sets up another. The king is the supreme pontiff of the nation and authorizes every cult of the land; and under his sign-manual priests and prophets, soothsayers and magicians alike act. There was an imperious accent in this document which almost put it into the category of an order in council. A healing miracle of unexampled potency was asked, as though it were a common bit of tribute due from a subject territory. To heal a leper was one of the arts of high magic, and it was assumed that the prophet was a mere creature or puppet of the court, and that his oracles could be bought and sold. Perhaps there was a little excuse for that. Naaman's national traditions favoured the idea, and even in Israel itself within recent years bands of prophets had held themselves subject to the court and bound to respond to its wishes. With a royal letter one can surely do great things; and Naaman thought that, possessed of such credentials, he was sure to succeed, and to succeed according to his own ideas.

He expected that his pomp and his gold would win him deference and homage, that he would be healed with full display of divination, with solemn word and act and touch, with art formal and conspicuous in proportion to his own greatness and importance. "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Very different and unexpected was his reception. The prophet would not even see him, but sent him out a simple message—"Go and wash in Jordan seven times." Then his rage burst forth. This was the reward of his toil and his humiliation;—his sickly, suffering, shattered frame had been dragged through roadless wastes in hope of cure; his haughty spirit had abased itself to ask a favour of the conquered king of Israel and to come a suppliant to this mean place;

—and now, his sufferings unpitied, his pomp unnoticed, his gold despised, he is turned away like a beggar from the door, with the added insult of a foolish trivial message. He gazed on the yellow mud-stained stream which rolled beneath his feet at the bottom of its deep ravine; he thought of silver Abana and Pharpar, winding through the myrtle and apricot groves of his native home to their far-off inland sea; and, sick with disappointment and anger, he turned to begin his weary, hopeless journey back.

¶ I heard a sermon the other day, which was both beautiful and forcible, on the subject of pride. The preacher said that pride was a kind of disloyalty to God, and that pride was the sin of the man who would not ride with the troop, or be one of the rank and file, but would take his own solitary and wilful way; and that it was in a treasured and complacent solitariness that pride consisted. He said it was as though the mill-stream were too dignified to go through the mill, and that we must be prepared to go through the mill, and do the useful, obvious work. I think that was all true, and that a sort of solitariness, a desiring to do things in one's own way, an incapacity of working with other people, is all a part of pride.[1]

3. To find a leper's unsightly skin hiding a heart of untamed pride surprises us. But it is a part of that profound mystery of evil, parts of which are ever unfolding themselves to us as our knowledge of human nature widens. One might have thought that this commander-in-chief of the Syrian forces would have been humbled to the dust by the dire calamity which was preying upon his life; that his brilliant conquests would have passed out of mind, and that he would have loathed the decorations and costly raiment which seemed to mock the miserable flesh they adorned. But the stab that Fate had given, after smiling upon him in so many other things, only seemed to make him more vain, irritable, and overbearing. Men are reluctant to dwell on what is uncongenial and loathsome in their personal lot, especially when they are surrounded by groups of obsequious retainers. This great general liked to think of his victories, of the skilful strategy and courage he had shown on the battle-field, of the high price put upon his service by the king, of his gorgeous robes; and the face to which his attendants could scarcely lift their gaze

[1] A. C. Benson, *Along the Road*, 315.

without disgust, his half-insensate limbs, his swollen, tainted flesh, were kept out of mind as though they were an evil dream. Naaman had taken many fenced cities; but here, though health, happiness, recovery from leprosy were all at stake, he almost shipwrecked all for a moment's spleen. It is pitiful to think what havoc has been wrought, and is wrought every day, in noble lives by ungovernableness of temper. Just here so often the bravest, the most generous, fail most signally.

¶ It was the knightliest soul of all, who at the close of the Iliad lay on the sea-shore, shedding great tears, tossing now on his side, now on his back, now on his face, and anon rising upon his feet and roaming desolately up and down the beach of the salt sea—Achilles sleeplessly, inconsolably ruing the consequences of the wrath he would not tame. It was Alexander the Great who in a paroxysm of passion hurled his weapon at the man whom he loved best, and robbed life of its dearest joy. They too, like Naaman, with his horses and his chariots, were great soldiers, valiant in battle—they teach us where the roots of passion lie, against what sin we must prevail, if passion is to take her rightful place. The young, the brave, the strong are naturally passionate; it is the sin that we most easily forgive, because it has in it the seed and promise of great things; from the noblest natures it is hardly ever absent. It is an untrained gift of God. The best of us, I am sure, can always remember the times, not once or twice only in his life, when "he turned and went away in a rage." But passion must be brought to heel.[1]

4. Why was it that Naaman "turned and went away in a rage"? It was a sense of personal slight, of wounded vanity. The great general of Syria stood before the poor abode of the prophet of Samaria. He was used to deference, to punctilious observance and respect, to the prompt, obedient, soldierly salute. He was one of those set in authority. And the position of authority brings its sure temptations. Indignation is prone to flare up out of wounded vanity. Naaman wanted something which would show off his greatness, which would flatter his self-esteem. There is that in human nature which is not only roused by difficulties, but flattered by demands; which craves for display; which seeks to satisfy the sense of inner strength, the capacity of will or of endurance, the independence of spirit, upon

[1] G. H. Rendall, *Charterhouse Sermons*, 56.

which we plume ourselves. But before God offers us these opportunities, He requires the inward mastery over self.

¶ This hero of many battles made his pilgrimage to Samaria with a mind full of the most detailed preconceptions. Perhaps it was due in part to an idolatrous training. When a man has worshipped graven images which having eyes see not, hands and handle not, feet and walk not, it is necessary that programmes should be arranged on their behalf. Their fête-days must be fixed, their viands chosen, their processions appointed, and their actions predetermined. A devotee in heathen temples naturally falls into the habit of forestalling the wishes of his immobile deity. And Naaman seems to have brought the habit with him and arranged things in detail for God and His prophet. The order and form of the miracle is settled beforehand. Perhaps his ready-made opinions are due in part to temperament also, and to his experience in the campaigns he had led. We can see at once that he has the imagination out of which successful military commanders are made, for he has the whole thing perfectly mapped out before his eye. He has planned the situation as he would have planned a battle, but for once his calculations are at fault. Nothing turned out just as he had expected, for he was dealing with events in which he could not force or control the issue. This famous chieftain had been accustomed to gather up clues and arrange tiny details beforehand, and everything was elaborated within his own fancy, even to the words of thanksgiving he would speak at the fitting moment. But when God works He does not work according to our schemes and programmes. God's methods are always simple, and the simpler the method the greater the achievement. Recoil from the simplicity of God's methods contributes not a little to the sum of the world's unbelief. Those methods are simple beyond our dreams. Our pride is a part of the deep disease that needs to be grappled with, and God cannot deliver us by a complex method that flatters our appetite for distinction and vainglory. We always want to make salvation deep, obscure, abstruse. But God always wants to make it plain. The pathway of eternal life is the pathway in which we go like common wayfarers, and believe when no sign from spiritual worlds gleams about our pathway, and the prophet himself who has given us God's message is far away in the background. Where His word is trusted, God never fails to work.[1]

¶ In 1697 we find Thomas Story (the coadjutor of William Penn) and another friend calling at the residence of Peter the

[1] T. G. Selby.

Great, who was in London *incognito*, where they wished to leave the Latin edition of Barclay's *Apology*, hoping that it might fall under the notice of the Czar. They had an opportunity of conversing with him on some of the views held by Friends. The following Sunday morning, as Thomas Story was sitting in Gracechurch Street Meeting, he saw two gentlemen enter; they were dressed in the usual costume of Englishmen of that period, but this did not prevent him from recognizing the Emperor and his interpreter. A minister named Robert Haydock was preaching about the cure of Naaman, and—entirely unaware of the high rank of one of his hearers—he said, "Now, if thou wert the greatest king, emperor, or potentate upon earth, thou art not too great to make use of the means offered by the Almighty for thy healing and restoration, if ever thou expect to enter His Kingdom, into which no unclean thing can come." Fifteen years later, when Peter the Great's troops had taken possession of the Friends' Meeting-house at Frederickstadt, he not only ordered the soldiers out of it, but gave notice that he would attend a meeting in it, if the few Friends residing there were inclined to hold one. As his Generals did not understand German, the Emperor, with much seriousness, acted as interpreter in this meeting, remarking that whoever would live in accordance with such doctrine would be happy.[1]

5. The words of his serving men to Naaman were full of better insight: "If the prophet had bade thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" and it is pleasing to see that, although the remonstrance came from his own servants, Naaman saw that it was a reasonable remonstrance. At once he resolved to acquiesce in their suggestion, and do what Elisha had prescribed. It required the restraining and repressing of his pride to go down at all to the water, and as he had to dip seven times this would be a trial also of his faith and his perseverance. God meant the process to curb Naaman's pride as well as to cure his leprosy. In all likelihood there would be no sign of a cure until the seventh bath had been taken. Accordingly, the wonder was that he did not desist at one of the previous plunges. He would have done so had his pride still prevailed; but a better spirit was now in him, and so he persevered through all the prescribed number.

[1] F. A. Budge, *Annals of the Early Friends*, 405.

In truth the shock of rage and indignation was the beginning of his cure. His mind was leprous like his body, crusted over with pride and arrogance, diseased with haughty self-consciousness and contempt for others. It needed the rude plainness of the prophet to tear away this covering of self, to teach him, as years of suffering had not taught him, his own true littleness. Flattered and caressed and feared and waited on, he had seemed to himself more than man; now for the first time he met a fellow-man who had looked him through and through; had cast aside as trifling and of no account his splendour and his fame; had laid bare his inmost self and tested it to see if it were true or false.

¶ Burnand has an excellent picture in which he represents with great success a well-known character in Bunyan's *Holy War*. This is Mr. Loth-to-Stoop, and the artist has given him that superior look and erect back which are the outward and visible signs of the inward possession of the heart by pride. Mr. Loth-to-Stoop, Bunyan tells us in his own inimitable way, was a very stiff and proper gentleman, who was not averse from making terms with Emmanuel as long as his claim to superior treatment was observed. If he was to give the pilgrimage the benefit of his countenance he must not be expected to do any stooping. The configurement of his spine did not permit so unbecoming an attitude for a person so uprightly superior as he. If the Prince would have him to give alms, that he could do with dignity and condescension; or if salvation were offered at a purchasable price he would do himself the honour of entertaining the offer. But when Mr. Loth-to-Stoop was told that salvation could only be gained by bending the back, and humbling the knee, by no trust in any merits of his own, but in casting himself as utterly worthless upon the mercy of God in Christ, he was sadly put to it. It meant nothing less than a revolution of his whole life, the abandonment of his most cherished convictions, the relinquishing of that love which had become second nature in him—the love of self, and it is this still which hinders so many from accepting Christ. They cannot stoop. They want to receive Christ and His salvation in an attitude of condescension, and they refuse to receive Him on the only terms on which He can be received—by self-prostration and self-abasement. One of the hardest things in life is for a proud heart to jettison its pride, and receive salvation on the merits, not of self, but of Christ. In the realm of redemption we must *stoop to conquer*.[1]

[1] J. Burns, *Illustrations from Art*, 265.

6. Naaman was a fine man, one worthy for the great king to lean upon, not so much because he was captain of the host, and had done deeds of war, but because he at once got the better of his temper, and stamped so quickly upon his pride, and "went down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." Health quivered through every nerve, and rushed through every vein of his body, and the healed man knew the touch of God. And with the healing there came a great spiritual enlightenment in which he saw it all. His healing was not through the prophet, as he thought; it was not the Jordan that had wrought the cure. It was all of God; and he had but got into the line of obedience and faith. Naaman hastened back to the prophet, not thinking of him at all. "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." And he prayed that he might have given him two mules' burden of earth; for his altar should stand upon soil from this goodly land, the land of Israel; and henceforth would he sacrifice to the God of Heaven only.

¶ Obedience, though it may look at first sight like a mere abandonment of our will, is for that very reason capable of becoming the very highest act of will. For—

Our wills are ours to make them Thine.

To submit our will to God's will, and so to make His will our own, is the highest form of self-determination, and therefore the greatest step towards the formation of a character that is truly free; free, that is, not from the law, but by the law,—the law which no longer appears as an alien restraint, because it is incorporated with the self. Hence the ethical and spiritual value of obedience; it is the road, and the necessary and only road, to freedom.[1]

Can peach renew lost bloom,
Or violet lost perfume;
Or sullied snow turn white as overnight?
Man cannot compass it, yet never fear:
The leper Naaman
Shows what God will and can;
God who worked there is working here;
Wherefore let shame, not gloom, betinge thy brow,
God who worked then is working now.

[1] J. R. Illingworth, *Divine Transcendence.*

III.

Naaman and the House of Rimmon.

In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant; when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.—2 Kings v. 18.

The figure of Naaman is set in strong contrast with those of Elisha and Gehazi. These two are types of holiness and sordidness. Naaman stands apart, courtier and man of the world, in touch and sympathy with the breadth of human life. His is a pleasant figure, like his name, which means "Pleasantness." He is such a representative gentleman of Damascus as we meet in the pages of *Tancred*. Everything we read of him is attractive, and characteristic of "a good fellow and a dashing officer." The frank manner, the generous heart that is not without its touch of hot temper, the ready gratitude and the warm friendships, make a wholly lovable and delightful sketch of the man.

It is for such men that questions of casuistry and compromise arise, making life at once difficult and fascinating. It was a comparatively easy matter for Elisha and Gehazi to go on their ways—the one "splendidly unhindered," the other vulgarly unscrupulous. But Naaman is by far the most interesting of the trio. It is true that our ideas of him are more or less conjectural. We know few of the facts and circumstances of his life. We have to divest ourselves of many ideas and associations before we can get back to where he stood. Yet it is evident that there are always some whose contact with Jehovah sends them to the desert, and others whom it sends back into the world, and that Naaman is in the latter class. Just because he returns to the world, we see him moving on a wider and more perplexing field. He finds himself "on the dangerous edge of things," where he has to face practical questions of far greater subtlety than those which confront such men as the other two.

¶ We are to fight, not only against the world around us, but the world *within us*, and in proportion as we overcome the world within us, we shall be able to exert a good influence on those around us. There is such a thing as morbid scrupulosity; there is a disease among professing Christians, one that sees small things

appear large, and large things appear small; but Jesus never loses the right balance. A Christian should be like a safety-lamp, able to go into noxious vapours, and yet remain separate from them, by prayer, humility, and the love of Christ—he himself giving light, and yet being in safety, undisturbed, untouched by them.[1]

1. It was probably with a thin vein of curiosity running through a thick crust of scepticism and contempt that this proud but sorely stricken man had turned to the Jewish prophet, as a man given up by his physicians turns to what is called a "quack," easing the strain upon his pride with the reflection that, if the issue left him no better, it could leave him no worse. But now he was cured and made whole. The healthy blood coursing through his veins sent a delirious sensation of joy pulsating through his being. His flesh, "like unto the flesh of a little child," left him in no more doubt about his physical salvation than he had who, centuries later, said: "Whereas I was blind, now I see." Naaman, too, could say: "Whereas I was diseased, now I am whole"; and we are quite prepared to be told that under the immediate influence of this wondrous change he said to Elisha: "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: and thy servant"—mark the altered tone in the man —"thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord," and that he wanted to load Elisha with gifts. Part of the real charm of the story consists in the consistency with which Elisha maintained the character of an incorruptible prophet; his wants were so simple that he stood above the temptation of a bribe, and he steadily refused all largess. Then Naaman asked to be allowed to take a few sacks of Caanan's earth, that in his own land he might build a fit altar to Jehovah. Among the Semites it was the universal custom to regard each god as attached to, and limited by, the land where he was worshipped. Consequently the very earth and stones of that land were sufficient to draw the god to the prayer of a worshipper; and they were necessary, for only on some part of his own land could he act. Other earth was looked after by other gods. Thus, among those tribes, not only did the saints, but the gods themselves, "take pleasure in her stones," and "her very dust to them was dear."

[1] Adolph Saphir, in *Memoir* by G. Carlyle, 373.

¶ It is easy to denounce this, as Matthew Henry does in his antithetic way: "He had spoken lightly of the waters of Israel, and now he overvalues the earth of Israel." Yet the story does not say that the request was refused, and we gather that it was conceded. It was a heathen superstition, and yet, like other heathen superstitions, it expressed a deep and abiding human instinct behind the error. In later times a Jewish synagogue was raised by Jews in Persia, all of whose stones and earth had been brought from Jerusalem. Soil from the Holy Land was brought in the Middle Ages for the Campo Santos of Italy: and it is a very pathetic picture that is presented by those old-fashioned ships carrying earth across the seas for the covering of the beloved dead.[1]

2. The house of Rimmon presents a different and a more complex situation than the two mules' burden of earth. The phrase has become the very synonym for religious compromise, and prejudices the case from the outset.

(1) While Naaman was making his confession and the declaration based upon it, his thoughts were recalled to the life he had momentarily left and to which he must return. He would have to go back to Syria and with its mighty king bow himself in the house of Rimmon; bow to that which was now to him a vain idol, and nevermore a god. As the thought of the future loomed and darkened in his mind he knew better than to cherish illusions about it. His restored health would be an object of hatred to the priests of the popular religion, and his new conviction, or change of religion, so much fanaticism to the well-bred worldliness of Syria. Hence with sadly cadenced tones, with very tears in his words, he made appeal to the prophet: "In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant; when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing."

(2) Rimmon was one of the many Baals, and Baal in general was the apotheosis of the fructifying powers of nature. In later times the cult was connected with that of Adonis, the story of the year, the summer triumph and the winter death of the sun. The Baals were lords of the wind and weather, the rain and sunshine, the air and clouds, the thunder and storm. Especially was Baal

[1] J. Kelman, *Ephemera Eternitatis*, 209.

the sun god, source of the abundance of light and heat, that led the seeds to ripeness in the fertile earth. The name Rimmon, signifying the pomegranate, has the suggestion of all this in its luscious fulness, and is peculiarly appropriate for the divinity that presided over the sweet and rich life of Damascus. So this "prince of the power of the air" stood for nature and the life of the earth. The cult was not so much a worship as an appreciation of the world in all its fulness. God, to the Damascus worshipper, was "the view"—He was anything a man liked. Further, Rimmon was the particular Baal of Damascus, and the ritual had a large element of politics in it. Worship was not a matter of private faith any more than it was a matter of spiritual communion. It was essentially a civic and national act. The gods were representative members of the nation, and their worship was official and political in its significance, involving before all else loyalty to the throne and customs of the land.

So the question that faced Naaman was whether he would retire from the world into asceticism and private life, or whether he would remain in the world and serve Jehovah. He no longer worshipped the world, for he had looked beyond it and seen the face of God. But he still appreciated its charm, and he still enjoyed its labours. He chose the latter course. As to the detail of ritual, we can imagine him saying to himself that a God so great in healing would be great also in understanding, so that the act of compromise was in one way an act of faith.

¶ No one can think of Naaman without recalling Tom Brown's judgment, "I can't stand that fellow Naaman, after what he'd seen and felt, going back and bowing himself down in the House of Rimmon. . . . I wonder Elisha took the trouble to heal him." Who does not honour the boy and thank God for him? And yet the matter is not so easy as that, and when Tom comes to face a man's difficulties, he will find that the short cut is not always the true solution, but may sometimes be only a refusal to face all the facts. There are illegitimate compromises, but there are also wise and good ones, which may save conscience from growing pedantic, and lives from being wasted over trifles not worthy of them. They may save men also from the inordinate vanity of those who imagine that to shout "No compromise" is to secure a monopoly of honesty and courage.[1]

[1] J. Kelman.

(3) So far as Naaman was concerned, and, taking the position from his point of view, we are not very much surprised that he asked this concession to it. Our difficulty is the fact that it was granted. The request we can understand, but what about the answer? After having put the pride of this Syrian through a discipline so severe, to accede to what looks like an overture to the old life, instead of admonishing him to avoid the very appearance of idol-worship, has, on the face of it, the look of a dangerous compromise. How, then, are we to understand this answer? We need not interpret it as either approving or disapproving of the thing behind the request. Elisha recognized the difficulties of the position in which Naaman was placed, and his answer, "Go in peace," is but another way of saying, "Go back to Syria, and there be all you can." Not that he compromised with idolatry, but that he refrained, and wisely refrained, from demanding the impossible in circumstances where the possible would be terribly hard. If, when Naaman got back to Syria, he put the best there was in him into the determination to be what in the joy of his cleansing he had vowed before Elisha, he did mighty things. Life had to be lived after the vow, and, as the joy toned down, the difficulties would increase.

¶ On one occasion Dr. Barnardo was considering one of those thorny, troublesome questions which so often confronted him, where prudence and policy seemed to urge in one direction, the dictates of duty in another. "What would you do if you were called upon to decide this matter?" he suddenly asked, turning to a gentleman who was present. He who was questioned considered a moment. "I think I should do so and so," he answered. The suggestion seemed good. It struck a middle course, and appeared to clear away the difficulty, but it was unmistakably a compromise with the sterner side of duty. The Doctor pondered. "Yes," he said, "that is the easy way out of it; but, you know, I never take the easy way." And that was true of his whole career. He never took the easy way.[1]

(4) There was nothing dishonourable or cowardly about Naaman's action in bowing in the house of Rimmon; he could do no other if he were to do his duty; it was only a question of how much or how little circumstances would let him do. He was not trying to spare himself, or to do secretly what he was afraid to do

[1] *Memoirs of the Late Dr. Barnardo*, 284.

publicly; he was not holding on to offices and emoluments which were tenable only at the price of hypocrisy and pretence; he was doing the best that it was in his power to do. People often talk as though it were the simplest thing in the world to find out what is the right thing to do in every given instance; it is nothing of the sort; it is often very hard indeed, and we can grow morally only by the earnestness with which we endeavour to search the matter out in every given case. There is always a practical right in every choice, let the ideal right be what it may. The ideal right is always beyond our power to give expression to in its fulness; our present earthly conditions do not permit of it; but the practical right, the one right thing possible to do in every given instance, is what God expects from us. It was right that Naaman should remain captain of the host of Syria even at the cost of bowing in the house of Rimmon when he could not help it, and it may be right that we should serve God where we are and as we are, even at the cost of feeling our comparative helplessness to remedy the ills around us.

¶ Professor Henry Jackson, replying to the criticism that Henry Sidgwick was a man who "sat on the fence," said that it was a complete mistake. "The man who 'sits on the fence' is one who, whether he has or has not definite convictions, is reluctant to declare himself. . . . Sidgwick's conclusions were often compromises, and might change surprisingly; but they were always exactly thought out, confidently affirmed, and eagerly defended." At the same time the fact cannot be overlooked that, in matters of policy, Sidgwick's mind was liable to great and scrupulous oscillations, which bewildered supporters and opponents alike; this arose partly from a genuine and deep-seated diffidence, and still more from a conscientious dread of not doing full justice to the opinions of those with whom he began by disagreeing.[1]

[1] A. C. Benson, *The Leaves of the Tree*, 51.

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